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**THE GROWTH OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT**

THE GROWTH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Thomas BY
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SECOND EDITION REVISED



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PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to enable the general reader, and especially our young people, to see the Bible from the modern point of view. Its style and matter have been deliberately chosen to appeal to boys and girls at the age when they leave elementary schools. While it is not a history, either of the Jews or the Bible, it aims at dealing with certain important events in the life of a people, so that Scripture may be read in the light of history.

The aim so defined has determined the method followed. Events must be made to live, and therefore description must be vivid; the book must be short, consequently the events dwelt on must be few; the treatment must be proportional, a consideration which keeps out many tempting themes; and, lastly, the fact that the book is intended for boys and girls makes it advisable to emphasize the heroic element in which the Bible is so rich. Hence, as far as possible, each chapter has been made to hinge on some great moment in the development of the Hebrew people, and around this have been

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gathered the main points of the subject to which the chapter is devoted. The pictorial element will appear to some as a waste of space, but school-masters regard it as essential. Too many recent books on the Bible have been of the overcrowded text-book order; our endeavour has been to produce something that the young people will read. At the same time a great deal has been packed both into the descriptions and into the more condensed parts of the text.

In certain places definite statements may be found where a less confident tone would better suit the present position of Biblical inquiry. That, however, is a weakness common to all elementary text-books and classrooms; qualifications and exceptions come in the more advanced stages. Moreover, there is a great distinction between the modern point of view and modern views: the former is one, the latter are many. We are not concerned to teach either the most advanced or the more conservative views on particular points: our desire is to get our young people to look at the Bible with an open mind, and with some sense of the way in which the book has come into existence: what precise opinion they form on this story and that poem is a matter on which we need have little anxiety.

The author is under great obligation to a circle of

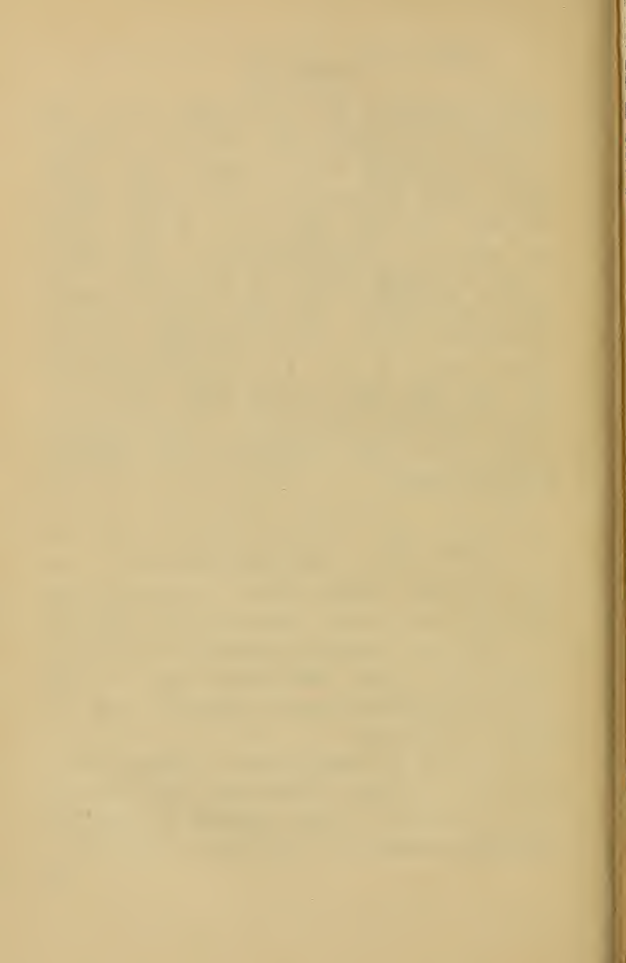
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men, consisting of Mr Joshua Holden, M.A., and the Revs. G. G. Hornby, M.A., B.D., H. J. Watts, R. H. B. Shapland, and J. T. Brewis, B.A., B.D., each of whom has read the work, both in outline and MS., and made suggestions. To this extent the book is a corporate production. The Revs. R. H. B. Shapland and J. T. Brewis are especially to be thanked: the latter because his comments have been so full and important, and the former because the idea of producing the book in this way began with him, and he has throughout acted as secretary to the circle, in which capacity, as well as in his own contributions, he has rendered invaluable service.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE first edition of this book was published for the educational work of the United Methodist Church. It is now issued through the ordinary channels in the hope that it may assist a wider circle to deal with Biblical difficulties and to appreciate more the greatest of all books.

I have taken the opportunity of making a few corrections and slight amplifications; otherwise the text is unchanged. A short appendix is added on telling Bible stories.



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VI. THE COMPLETION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT—

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THE GROWTH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I THE BEGINNINGS

1. THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

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WIDE stretches of moorland heather are sometimes swept by fires which leave the hills all bare and black, but within a few seasons fresh shoots have sprung from the charred soil, and a denser growth, more beautiful than ever, paints the moor with its purple glory. In some such manner we may think of the Bible. It is a collection of books divided into two parts,

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the Old and New Testaments. The former is the Jewish Bible, a library of books which grew out of the religion of the Hebrews, an ancient people who settled in Palestine about 1200 B.C. The latter is a collection of writings which tell of a greater religion which grew out of the former. The Jewish religion was noble and inspiring, but there came a time when it shrivelled up. However, just when it looked useless and dead, there suddenly sprang from it, like the new growth of heather from the burnt hillside, the still more wonderful Christian religion. We see, then, that the two Testaments are not of the same age; and this is true, not only of the Testaments as a whole, but also of many of their parts. The Bible did not come into existence all at once: it grew, and this growth of the Bible is to be the subject of our study. We shall endeavour to understand it by studying some of the greatest crises in the long development, and we will begin with the important period of the Exodus. To go through every part of the story is far too great a task; but if we can really learn some of the main events which created the Bible and gave it its character, they will throw light on all the rest. We shall have gained the key to its understanding, and learned the secret of its lasting power.

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THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

The Flight from Egypt, near 1200 B.C.—Onward with eager haste, through wild and barren land, presses a vast throng of men, women, children, and cattle. Drivers are shouting at their herds and hurrying their horses. Women take tired children by the hand to help them along. There a cart with broken axle is being rapidly emptied of its richest contents. Yonder, waiting for the crowd to pass, the vultures are gathered to feast on the body of an animal that has fallen and broken its leg. Shouting, crying, lowing, bleating, this multitude hastens southward along the desolate shore of a wide and shallow sea. It is a mob of escaped slaves, carrying their goods and driving their flocks, with hope of freedom in their hearts and fear of capture spurring them on. It is the children of Israel fleeing from the bondage of Egypt.

As the day wears on their terror deepens. Messengers have come in with the tidings that a pursuing army is fast overtaking them. To make matters worse hills are seen ahead blocking the way. At last, as night comes on, they find themselves shut in between the mountains, the sea, and their pursuers. Everywhere there is an outcry that they have been misled and trapped. Moses, their leader, has

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done some wonderful things: but so far he has only brought them into trouble. Now they will either be butchered in an unequal conflict, or carried back by their conquerors into a bondage made worse than ever.

Deliverance.—Suddenly a message from Moses runs from lip to lip: “Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD.” His hand is stretched out toward the waters, which are rapidly ebbing away. Wondering and amazed, the people watch the retreating waves until they are lost in the night. Presently the word is given to march into the sea. Across the flat stretches of sand, splashing through the pools, and struggling over muddy places, the Hebrews make their way like men walking in a sleep, dazed by the very wonder of their deliverance. By and by they reach rising ground, and with a thrill of renewed hope realize that the sea is crossed.

But all is not yet over. As the early dawn throws its beams along the track they have followed, the light is sent back from the glittering spears of their pursuers. The Egyptians, labouring to get their chariots through the mud, are slowly advancing. Again the Israelites are afraid, but their fear soon passes. The wind, which had driven back the waters, has ceased to blow. The tide has turned. The waves

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are sweeping up line upon line.¹ The Egyptians see their danger, but see it too late. Shouts of dismay rise from their ranks. The men throw down their arms. They rush for safety. But the waters move too swiftly. The salt sea spreads its shroud over that mighty army, and the pride of Egypt is broken.

Effect on the Hebrews.—Standing on the sloping shore, weary and unnerved with their long march and many fears, the Israelites have watched this tragedy. Do we wonder that, as a nation, they never quite forgot it? That strange deliverance when all seemed lost, and the terrible fate of their enemies, sank into their minds. Throughout their history this crossing of the Red Sea remained an inspiring memory. Its immediate influence is reflected in “the Song of Moses,”² which celebrates the triumph. It created a new confidence in their leader. It proved to them that Jehovah was able to deliver even from the greatest perils. And it filled them with faith in their future, with the belief that they were to become a great nation by the power of their mighty God.

¹ See Ex. xiv. 21 and xv. 10.

² See Ex. xv. 1–18.

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GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

It was late in the thirteenth century before Christ when the children of Israel thus escaped from their Egyptian bondage. From the Red Sea they fled into the desert, and journeyed on, like a tribe of wandering Arabs, till they came to Mount Sinai, where the greatest event in the history of the Hebrews took place, namely, the establishment of the Covenant between the nation and Jehovah. God speaks to nations through great souls, and this Covenant was communicated to the people through Moses. He went up into the Mount, tarried there in communion with God, and returned with the conditions on which the Covenant was to be based. God put His thoughts into the mind of His servant, and the Covenant expresses those thoughts. It may appear to some that the deliverance from Pharoah was more important and wonderful than any revelation of God's will could possibly be; but we shall see as we go on that it was this Covenant, and the laws in which it was embodied, that made the Hebrews a great nation, and enabled them to give the Bible to the world. That is why we call this the greatest event in their history. The memory of the escape from the Egyptians was graven deep in the hearts of the people; but the

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impression made by the Covenant was deeper still.

Acceptance of the Covenant.—Now a covenant is a contract, of a more serious nature than ordinary business contracts, and entered into in a more binding way. In the case of the Israelites it was between God and the whole nation. Certain conditions were set forth, which they must undertake and fulfil if they were to be Jehovah's people; on the other hand Jehovah promised that if they fulfilled these conditions He would be their God, mighty to deliver and full of grace. Moses set these conditions before the people and the people accepted them, after which the Covenant was publicly confirmed. An altar was built beneath the mountain, sacrifices were offered, the people pledged themselves to obey God, and the Covenant was made binding to the fullest extent. Thus Israel became by its own free choice God's covenanted people, pledged to the laws which are the conditions of the Covenant of Sinai; and Jehovah became their covenanted God, bound to them so long as they remained obedient to His commands.

Character of the Covenant.—In Exodus xx. 22-xxiii. 33 we have a special section known as 'the Book of the Covenant,' which contains the conditions then laid down. It is more than three thousand years since Moses died, but that section has

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remained little altered since his time. When it is studied the feature which most impresses us is its emphasis on man's duty to God and his neighbour. There came a time, later, when the Hebrews cared only for religious ceremony, and thought that as long as they brought plenty of offerings to God's temple He would let them do what they liked; but the Covenant demanded faithfulness to duty from the beginning. It always put obedience before sacrifice. The duties which the Covenant imposed are those which make a true and happy national life. Its laws are concerned with matters of everyday intercourse. They regulate the relations between master and servant, neighbour and neighbour, stranger and native. They lay down the road along which a holy nation must necessarily travel. The Book of the Covenant has been likened to Magna Carta, the foundation deed of England's liberties. The things about which the Hebrew laws are concerned, however, are not political, but moral. Reverence, purity, justice, honesty, kindness, truth—these are the demands of Israel's Magna Carta.

The Decalogue.—The Ten Commandments are not included in the Book of the Covenant, but are closely associated with it. They emphasize the chief duties of the Covenant in a form convenient for memorizing. Among a people possessed of little or no litera-

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ture, laws must be circulated in a form easy to teach and remember. Hence there arose these concise statements of law known as the Decalogue, all of which were originally very brief, as the sixth, seventh, and eighth still are. We may look upon them, therefore, as a terse summing up of the conditions of the Covenant, prepared for the common people, that every man in Israel might know his duty as a member of the chosen people of Jehovah.

Imperfection of the Covenant.—The laws of the Covenant, however, were not perfect. Our Lord Jesus Christ referred to one of them¹ when He said: "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."² He thus replaced the imperfect law of the Covenant with His own perfect command, and put love in the place of vengeance. But though the laws may not have been perfect, they all put some check on passion and selfishness; they enforced moral principles fitted to make men better, and to lead the nation to health, strength, and happiness.³

¹ See Ex. xxi. 24.

² See Matt. v. 38-39.

³ The Greek word translated 'covenant' can also be translated 'testament,' which explains the names given to the two parts of our Bible. The Old Testament is the part governed by the covenant of Moses: the New Testament is governed by the new covenant, the perfect law of Christ.

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God's Free Choice.—Another important feature of the Covenant is the fact that it rested on God's free choice. According to it God had made the Israelites His people by an act of His own mercy and grace. When they entered the Promised Land they found nations worshipping other gods; but they never found another nation that had been chosen by its god. All these nations believed that they could not but belong to their gods: the Hebrews knew that Jehovah could have chosen an entirely different people. The relation of the heathen to their gods was natural: between Jehovah and Israel the relation was ethical. The natural tie was like blood relationship; it was of the body and could not be broken: the ethical tie was a moral relationship, like that which Paul asked for when he said: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus": it was a relation of will and would be weakened whenever the nation failed in its duty. The Moabites, for example, thought that they belonged to their god Chemosh by a natural necessity. They regarded him as the ancestor of the tribe, and no more able to cast off his people than he could cast off his own shadow. But Jehovah was not the ancestor of the Hebrews. He was not related to them by flesh and blood. He had chosen them, and saved them, and they were called to love Him.

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The bonds between the people and Himself were to be those of obedience, loyalty, and goodwill. And as He had chosen them, so He could cast them off if they proved unfaithful. This did not mean that Jehovah was less to the Hebrew than Chemosh was to the Moabite, or Milcom to the Ammonite; but it did mean that to retain Jehovah's favour the Hebrew must do His bidding, must fulfil his own side of the Covenant. Thus the Covenant spurred them on along the path of obedience to God's will. Whenever through sin they were in distress and wanted Jehovah to save them, they knew that the one thing needful to secure His aid was obedience, the fulfilment of the Covenant of Sinai.

A Revelation of God.—Moreover, the commandments and laws of the Covenant embody a great revelation of God's character. To these Hebrew tribes God had in the past been little more than a name: now they were to be taught and trained in the knowledge of the Most High. Their escape from bondage had shown them God's grace and power: grace in that He had had pity on the oppressed, and power in that He was able to deliver them from their foes. But at Sinai they gained also a clear idea of Jehovah's providence and justice. There they discovered that the God with Whom they had to do was One Who defended the helpless and

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needy, and Who punished falsehood, cruelty, and crime. In many respects their thoughts about God were still wrong. For example, long after the time of Moses they continued to think of Jehovah as the God of their race alone, whereas He is the God of the whole earth. But the revelation at Sinai contained the great truths of God's righteousness and providential rule, which lie at the roots of all true life and religion, which were gradually expanded later by the prophets, and which find their full expression in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

More Revelations to Come.—We must notice also that the thought of God associated with the Covenant was one which actually suggested this idea of growth. The very name by which God was made known emphasized it. Jehovah stands for 'I am' or 'I will be.' The words "I am that I am"¹ are better translated "I will be that I will be." God wanted them to understand that He was more than they yet realized. "You know Me as such and such to-day," He seemed to say, "but you will know Me as Someone far greater in the future." They were thus led to expect further revelations and to look to the march of history for a fuller unfolding of the mysteries of God. Jehovah was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their past, the Guide

¹ Ex. iii. 14.

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and Saviour of their nation; but He was also the God of the future, leading them to larger achievements, and showing them through their national and individual experiences more and more of the glory of His majesty.¹

THE REMAKING OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

After a year's stay at Sinai the Hebrews set out on their journey to the Promised Land. This journey, which might have been accomplished in a few months, lengthened out to something like forty years. The Promised Land was occupied by races which it was necessary to conquer, but of which the Israelites were afraid. They therefore turned back into the desert and began their wanderings in the wilderness. It was a keen disappointment; but there was no help for it. The generation that escaped from Egypt had been reared in slavery; and Israel was not prepared for the invasion

¹ The word 'Jehovah' is not a correct form. The Hebrew is *Yahweh*. The Jews, however, never pronounce this word, regarding it as blasphemy to utter the sacred name. In reading aloud the Scriptures, therefore, they always substitute for *Yahweh* their word for lord, and in their printed Bibles the vowels of this word are inserted with the consonants of *Yahweh* to save the reader from unguardedly pronouncing the Holy Name. Thus the name Jehovah is a conflate form with the consonants of one word and the vowels of another.

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of Canaan, nor did she become ready until that generation had passed away, and a new one, born in freedom and inured to hardship, had taken its place.

The Work of Moses.—That the Hebrews ever became fit to attempt the conquest of Palestine was mainly due to the work of Moses. Of all the great leaders God has given to the world, few have been equal to this man, who by God's help accomplished three gigantic tasks, any one of which would have made him great. First, he inspired his people with the hope of freedom, seized the opportunity when it arose, and led them out of bondage. Secondly, he was the bearer to them of a high and holy revelation of God's will and character which became a new starting-point for the national religion. Thirdly, as their leader throughout the wanderings in the wilderness, he moulded them into a nation, organizing them into a disciplined army, laying down laws with the insight of a true statesman, and establishing impressive religious ceremonies to express the revelation God had given him. He was far ahead of the people who looked up to him, for they were but little removed from heathenism. As a recent writer has said: "Their leader was one of the colossal figures in universal history, and it took many centuries to work out into clear consciousness the ideals which inspired him and the principles which

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he affirmed.”¹ But, however much Moses towered above the men of his age, he had a heart full of humility and love. He served God with all his might, and in serving God he saved his fellow-countrymen.

Israel Transformed.—Under this leadership of Moses, Israel was remade. They came out of Egypt a mere throng of more or less related kinsmen, with nothing but their common misery and a few tribal customs and traditions to hold them together; in the desert they grew into an organized people, fired with a great faith, and inspired with the sense of a great destiny. This growth is especially noticeable in three things: their laws, their religion, and their manhood. The Covenant provided the foundation for these, but throughout the wanderings cases of dispute were continually occurring which Moses had to settle, and his decisions had the force of law. Indeed, in view of all that God had done by him they were regarded as of divine authority, as parts of the revelation at Sinai on which they were based. In those days law and religion went together, so that as the law grew the religion grew. Such religious customs as they possessed before the Exodus were modified and improved by Moses, and new ones were added as he thought necessary. The development of their manhood went forward at the same

¹ Dr Peake's *The Bible*, etc., p. 233.

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time. The men and women were impressed by the new laws, by the religious customs, and by the order and discipline. The dangers and unexpected happenings of desert life were moulding them. The great personality of Moses was a constant source of enthusiasm and courage. Above all they were face to face with the mighty acts of God. Their religion was not only taught them by Moses: they saw its great truths enacted before their eyes. That they were a chosen people, that they had a great destiny, that Jehovah ruled over nature, that He judged the oppressor—these things were clear to every man in the events by which they had been delivered from Pharaoh. God inspired in wondrous measure many of the Hebrews; but we shall see as we follow their story that it was through the facts of their national experience even more than through the words of individuals that God revealed Himself and gave us the Old Testament. This is already clear in the story of the wanderings. The great acts of God, and the other ennobling influences mentioned, gradually produced their effect and greatly uplifted the character of Israel. The timid fugitives who turned back through fear were replaced by Joshua's bold warriors. The mob of escaped slaves became a heroic nation.

Non-Mosaic Elements.—In looking back upon the events of the wilderness, however, we must not make

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the mistake of supposing that everything belonging to Israel's law and religion began with Moses. No great religion is entirely new. Christianity sprang out of Judaism. Buddhism is an offshoot of the ancient religion of India. Mohammedanism has its roots in the Old Testament. Likewise the religion that Moses established gathered up into itself much that had gone before. The system of sacrifice, the distinction between things clean and unclean, the rite of circumcision—these were already in use, and by heathen races as well as Hebrews. Similarly, Moses and the Israelites made use of all the learning they possessed concerning law, justice, organization, trades, arts, commerce, etc. The stories of the training of Moses, first in the schools of Egypt and then in the desert of Midian, and of the advice of Jethro,¹ suggest a few channels through which ideas and customs derived from other races may have been brought at that time into Israel.

The Patriarchs.—In addition to all this there were the traditions of their own earlier history. The question might be asked: Where at that time were the stories we have in Genesis of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph? The answer is that they were among the recollections which the suffering slaves in Egypt treasured in their memories. It was to

¹ Ex. xviii.

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these that Moses appealed, and without them he would probably have failed to rouse Israel to attempt her escape. Then again, every people or tribe has its favourite and familiar stories. Mothers would tell their children the adventures of Joseph, and men would speak, as they gathered together after the day's toil, of Abraham's journeys. Then, too, love of the hero is early developed in the heart of a people, as is well pictured by Macaulay :

And in the nights of winter,
When the cold north winds blow,
And the long howling of the wolves
Is heard amidst the snow;
When round the lonely cottage
Roars loud the tempest's din,
And the good logs of Algidus
Roar louder yet within ;

.

When young and old in circle
Around the firebrands close ;
When the girls are weaving baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows ;

.

With weeping and with laughter
Still is the story told,
How well Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old.

The situation recalled in these words is very different from desert life, but the spirit they express exists

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everywhere, and in that spirit the doings of the heroes and founders of the Hebrew nation were saved from being lost. Story-telling is largely practised wherever books are little used : it is common to-day among the Bedouins : and throughout the wanderings in the wilderness we can picture the children of Israel at night, round camp-fires and in their tents, telling these stories of the past. Thus their own earlier history and the customs of other races contributed much to the new start which Israel made in the desert.

Joshua and the Conquest.—At last Moses felt that his people were ready to go in and possess the Promised Land, so he led them back to the borders of Canaan. The time for conquest had come. The Lawgiver and Leader had done his work : now was the opportunity for the military man, the great captain. Moses died in the solitudes of Mount Nebo and the task of leadership fell to Joshua the general. By much bold campaigning he led Israel to victory after victory, until a strong position was gained in Palestine. It is a revelation of the change that had come over the Israelites during their wanderings to recall their victory at the waters of Merom. After they had overrun the South they learned that fear of them was uniting the peoples of the North, and that a great alliance was preparing to drive them back

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into the deserts. They therefore marched without delay straight up the Jordan valley, fell suddenly upon the confederates, and utterly routed them. A comparison of this confident and disciplined force, marching out from Gilgal, with the panic-stricken mob which we saw rushing helter-skelter along the shore of the Red Sea, will give us some idea of the extent to which Israel was recreated in the wilderness.

We must be careful, however, not to over-estimate the conquest of Canaan. The Book of Judges shows us that the old inhabitants remained in large numbers. Under Joshua the Israelites made good their footing in the land, and secured the hills, from which they were never driven; but the Canaanites retained the large cities in the valleys, the Philistines held the coast, other tribes were scattered over various parts, and for two centuries it remained uncertain which race would become the ruling nation. As long as Joshua lived the Israelites held the upper hand, because he could always gather the tribes together: but after his death they were often severely oppressed by their neighbours, until they were rescued by one of the 'judges,'¹ who succeeded in uniting some of the scattered tribes in the name of Jehovah and in breaking down the tyranny.

¹ Not a judge in the modern sense, but a person who helped his people to deliverance, and who also did something to revive or purify the worship of Jehovah.

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RELATION TO THE BIBLE

Preparing Materials.—We must now consider how these beginnings of the nation and its religion are related to the Bible. A moment's thought will bring home to us the fact that during this period the Bible did not exist. Israel's religion did not grow out of the Old Testament, but the Old Testament out of Israel's religion. The only possessions of the kind in the hands of the Hebrews at the end of the period we have surveyed were the Commandments and the Covenant. Yet the incidents of this period form an important part of the contents of the Bible. Perhaps the best way to put it is to say that these were ages of preparation: as the brickmakers, stone-quarriers, timber-cutters, etc., in different parts of the world, prepare materials out of which others may build a church in London, so these early Hebrews were shaping and preparing what others in later days gathered and wrote. By the habit of story-telling the outstanding events of the Wanderings and the Conquest were handed on to succeeding generations, just as the wanderers themselves handed on the stories of the Patriarchs. The setting up of memorials was another method of recording events and preparing materials for the Bible: a pillar, a mound of stones, a mark on some giant

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tree, or a new name for a village would serve to memorialize some great happening or experience. Here a difficulty was passed; here a battle won; here a wanderer found a home; and here some man felt drawn into the very presence of Jehovah.¹ In some cases a further step was taken, as when someone with a genius for poetry composed a song concerning an event. Songs are among the earliest literary creations of a people. They are specially good means of keeping a memory fresh, and several of them, like the Song of Moses and the Children of Israel, celebrating the escape from Egypt, are included in the Old Testament. In these and other ways, then, the wandering Hebrews were preparing materials for the Great Book.

Hebrew Distinctions.—But while all this may be regarded as material for the Bible, let us realize that the main preparation lay in a few things which distinguished Israel from the surrounding nations. Other races had their memorials and stories, their sacrifices and songs, yet no other race found out and taught men so much about God as the Hebrews. This teaches us to look for the special value of Israel, not in the things which it borrowed from others, but in the things which were peculiar to

¹ For illustrations see respectively Josh. iv. 20–22; 1 Sam. vii. 12; Gen. xiii. 18; Gen. xxviii. 18–19.

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itself. And the chief of these peculiarities are included in three great facts: first, the Hebrews had received a nobler idea of God, which condemned the degrading rites of heathen religions and gradually lifted Israel above them; second, the Covenant taught them the sense of duty, taught them that they could expect Jehovah's aid only as long as they fulfilled their obligations to God and man; and third, they possessed, as a nation, more good men who loved God and served Him even at the cost of their lives than any other people. In this chapter we have traced the beginnings of all these. We have seen their idea of God forming as Jehovah revealed Himself in the deliverance at the Red Sea, and in the revelation at Sinai; we have noticed how the Covenant emphasized moral conduct and demanded obedience; and we have found in Moses a splendid example of the servant of God. Indeed, Moses may be said to illustrate all three points: for in him especially do we find a higher thought of God, a stronger sense of duty, and a complete devotion to God's cause. He gathered up into himself and expressed in his grand endeavours all those peculiarities which made the Israelites the world's teachers of religion, and enabled them to produce the Old Testament.

CHAPTER II

THE TASK OF PROPHECY

1. ELIJAH'S CONFLICT WITH THE PRIESTS OF BAAL
2. THE NATIONAL APOSTASY. CAUSES—
 - Purity of Jehovah-worship
 - Corruption of Former Inhabitants :—these Races not Destroyed—their Idolatries—Influence on Israel—the Rechabites—Jehovah-worship Triumphant but Degraded
 - Foreign Influences :—Alliances of the Kings—Persecution by Jezebel—the Failure of the Priests
3. PRESERVATION OF THE NATIONAL FAITH. SECURED BY—
 - Racial Character of Faith in Jehovah
 - Revival and “ Schools of Prophets.” False Prophets
 - The Work of the Great Prophets
 - The Task of Prophecy. Elijah an Example

THERE was unbroken drought in Israel : the fields were withered, and the finest springs nearly dry. The last two harvests had been scanty, and all promise for the present year was destroyed. Throughout the land people were suffering and dying of hunger and thirst. Even in the palace of King Ahab there was want. The horses in the royal stables were starving, and an officer was sent out to get provender at all costs.

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Elijah and King Ahab, about 860 B.C.—This official in the course of his search met a man, clad in the rough garments of the desert, who sent him back to fetch the king. He obeyed, although in fear, because he knew this man to be the great prophet Elijah. Now Elijah had foretold the famine, and the king blamed him for it and wanted to put him to death. When, therefore, Ahab heard where the prophet was he came in great anger, and at once began: "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" "I have not troubled Israel," retorted Elijah (1 Kings xviii 18), throwing back the blame upon the king, "but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed the Baalim."

They were bold words, but Elijah was speaking for Him Who is above all kings; he therefore fearlessly denounced the idol-worship which Ahab practised, and declared the famine to be a punishment for this wickedness, and a proof that the Baalim could not send rain. Then the prophet daringly challenged the king and all his idols. He said that if Ahab would gather the people and the priests of his false gods to Carmel, he would face them and prove to all Israel that Jehovah was God alone.

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The Scene on Carmel.—Carmel is a mountain in the west of Palestine, close to the Mediterranean Sea, from which it runs back in a south-easterly direction for nearly thirteen miles. There it ends abruptly in a valley which divides it from the hills of central Palestine. It is a beautiful mountain, not bare and rocky, but clothed in rich vegetation. On this prominent height, sacred as an ancient place of worship, the idolatrous prophets were gathered, four hundred of them or more. There also were the people of the countryside, hungry and angry, looking fiercely at the man who was blamed for their distress. And there was Elijah, standing apart, the man who, for the sake of his God and his country, was daring the wrath of the people and king. He knew there would be no escape for him that day if he failed; but he did not hesitate. Let the prophets of Baal prepare an altar, and lay upon it a bullock for sacrifice. Elijah alone would prepare another. “And call ye on the name of your god,” ran the prophet’s challenge, “and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God.”

Elijah’s Victory.—The result is well known. The prophets of Baal cried and leaped round their altar; in their frenzy they gashed their bodies with knives. “But there was no voice, nor any that answered.” Elijah mocked their failure. “Cry aloud,” he

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called; "peradventure he sleepeth"; and loudly they cried, but all in vain. The afternoon passed, and the time came for the evening offering. The prophets of Baal had failed; and the people eagerly watched Elijah to see what he would do. Calmly he built his altar, and prepared his sacrifice. Then he bowed in prayer before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A great silence fell on the multitude, and the air was filled with that dread stillness which precedes a storm. Excitement gripped the crowd and held it spellbound. Suddenly the storm which had been gathering while Elijah prayed burst upon them. A flame flashed from the heavens, struck the altar, and utterly consumed the sacrifice.

The LORD had answered by fire.

It was the crowning moment in Elijah's ministry. His faith in Jehovah was vindicated. The falseness of Baal-worship stood exposed. In the vivid light that flashed from the sky the people saw it was not Elijah that had caused their sufferings, but the idolatries to which they had been tempted by the heathen priests. And with that revulsion of feeling, so terrible in an angry crowd, they turned, led by Elijah himself, upon the prophets of Baal and destroyed them. That night the drought ended in abundance of rain.

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THE NATIONAL APOSTASY

What is the meaning of this great scene? How came it to pass that four hundred devotees of a foreign religion could be summoned together by Israel's king, while the God of Israel was represented by one solitary man? Had the Hebrews lost the faith with which they entered Palestine? No, for the sequel shows how Elijah was aroused from a fit of depression by the reminder that there were still seven thousand in Israel, "all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." But the people had so mixed up idolatry with their religion that nearly all had practically ceased to worship Jehovah; otherwise this scene on Carmel could never have taken place. So let us now trace briefly this wandering from the God of their fathers. We shall find in it an explanation of Elijah's position, and we shall see that his work is typical of the labour done by all the prophets who taught and suffered in Israel.

Purity of Jehovah-Worship.—The decline in the worship of Jehovah was partly due to the very beauty and value of the religion itself. There was plenty of room for improvement in it, but with all its imperfections it was far above the religions

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of the nations around; history showed that it was also far above the desires of the Hebrews themselves. Such a faith demanded effort, courage, and self-restraint, and many were not willing to make the effort. They were careless about their best things and therefore they lost them. Thus the very purity of Jehovah worship, the one thing which made it worth struggling for, made it more difficult to retain. The people were not worthy of their God.

Opposing Influences.—This of itself, however, would not have robbed Israel of its religion. The nobler men would have been sufficient to carry the nation upward, had it not been that there were false, heathen religions ever competing with the national faith. The nation was like a heavily laden boat, which a few men are trying to row up a swift river. In spite of her weight the strong men at the oars would have pulled her forward, if only slowly, but for the current carrying her down faster than they could row her up the stream. This current, against which Jehovah-worship had to contend, was made up of many tributary influences. We have not space to study them all, but we can trace the main ones sufficiently to make clear the perils which threatened the life and religion of Israel.

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The Struggle for Mastery, 1200-1000 B.C.—The first group of influences opposed to Jehovah-worship was made up of the idolatry, witchcraft, sensuality, and superstition of the races which inhabited Palestine before the Hebrews. Those nations were neither driven out nor destroyed by the Israelites. The Canaanites retained the great cities of central Palestine, the Philistines became stronger and stronger along the coast, and other races held various districts. The Hebrews had gained the hill country and were never dislodged, but scattered over those highlands and separated by deep valleys they were in a weak, divided state, which made them an easy prey to any vigorous enemy. Their foes were quick to take advantage of this. From their fortified cities below, the Canaanites crept out to plunder and destroy the villages on the hills, until in desperation six of the tribes united under Deborah and Barak¹ and inflicted upon them a crushing defeat. In similar fashion the Philistines raided the towns and villages nearer the coast, and so sorely pressed the Danites that a large part of the tribe gave up the attempt to colonize the territory given them by Joshua, and migrated to the north, where they established themselves in a new district.² Samson, the hero of many strange adventures,³ achieved his

¹ Judges v. and vi.

² Judges xviii.

³ Judges xiii.-xvi.

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exploits in these early struggles with the Philistines. In the land to the east of the Jordan valley the old inhabitants were a constant peril. At the Dead Sea end of this eastern strip lived the Moabites who became oppressors soon after Joshua's time, and plundered Israel until Ehud the Benjamite broke their power.¹ Northward of Moab, in Gilead and Bashan, the territory of Gad and Manasseh, the Ammonites had held the ground: these gradually acquired strength to assert themselves, and were only put down after a grim struggle under Jephthah, whose victory was marred by the sacrifice of his daughter, an only child. Farther eastward, in the deserts, dwelt the Midianites, whose incursions at one time became an annual feature, making it useless to rear crops and herds, so sure were they to be swept away by these robbers. They were not inhabitants of the country, but neighbours, who were only dangerous when Israel lay in a weak and defenceless state, as in the days when God called Gideon to deliver it from their power. Thus the struggle went on for generations, and in the end Israel won. The victory, however, was only obtained by taking into the nation the conquered population, which belonged to other races and worshipped other gods.

¹ Judges iii. 12-30.

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Conflict of Religions. The Baalim.—All through this struggle for place and power another conflict was in progress—that between the faith of Israel and the religion of these older inhabitants. Most of the latter were worshippers of the Baalim. Baalim, the plural of Baal, meaning lord or owner, was the name given by the Canaanites to their local deities. Each district had its Baal or owner, who was supposed to own the streams, give or withhold rain, and thus control the fertility of the land. Images of the Baalim were set up in the high places and worshipped with rites which encouraged all manner of wickedness. When the Hebrews mixed with the Canaanites they soon fell under the influence of this corrupting worship. They did so all the more quickly because their life in Canaan was completely new. In the deserts they had been nomads, wandering from one place to another as soon as their cattle had eaten up the grass or whenever fancy urged them. But in their new home they became farmers, cultivating the land properly, building houses, and living in the same place year after year. Hence the fertility of the soil became their chief care, and they began to imitate the Canaanites, from whom they learnt much of their farming, in worshipping the Baalim who were supposed to be able to cause or prevent this fertility.

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Perils of a New Life. Rechabites.—They did not, however, give up their own religion. Jehovah was still their national God. But they accepted the idea that the Baalim had power over the land, the crops, and the herds. Thus they tried to hold two religions at the same time, with the result that the better one suffered. They came to think of Jehovah as merely a greater Baal, the owner of their race, just as the local Baal was thought to own the district. They worshipped idols at the local shrines. They practised divination and sorcery. In times of great emergency they even offered human sacrifice, as the case of Jephthah shows. An earnest effort to maintain Jehovah-worship was made only in very faithful homes and in special sanctuaries like Gilgal and Shiloh. The Rechabites, described in Jeremiah xxxv, illustrate how a determined Israelite may have looked at the life of Canaan and tried to save his family from its influence. The ancestor of this clan was so alarmed at the corruption that he commanded that his descendants should never live in houses, but keep to their tents and have nothing to do with tilling the soil; that is, they were to keep up their desert ways of living. Most of the Hebrews, however, soon settled down and felt the full force of the heathen environment. Yet in this, as in the struggle for political mastery, Israel triumphed.

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Faith in Jehovah survived the ordeal. When at last the monarchy was established under Israelitish kings, it was the worship of Jehovah, and not Baal-worship, which remained as the recognized religion of Israel.

Degradation of Hebrews.—Jehovah-worship triumphed, but it suffered in the conflict. It had become mixed up with all sorts of heathen practices. Most of the people no longer saw anything wrong in idolatry. They looked to the Ark of Jehovah to save them in battle just as the Philistines looked to their idol Dagon.¹ They shared in the wild and wicked celebrations at the high places. The first king of Israel, Saul, consulted the witch of Endor, although he is said to have expelled previously all such fortune-tellers. David, the second king, was glad to make use of the ephod² of a priest, believing that by this means he could get to know something about his future. Jeroboam, the leader of the revolt which split Israel into two kingdoms, actually set up bulls as images of Jehovah, and made idol-worship part of the official religion. He may have been trying to strengthen Jehovah-worship, but

¹ See 1 Sam. iv.

² See 1 Sam. xxiii. 6-13; xxx. 7-9. The word 'ephod' sometimes refers to a priestly garment, and sometimes, apparently, to an image. But the image was supposed to give oracles, and with the garment there went a pocket containing materials for drawing the sacred lot, Urim and Thummim. Thus in either case the ephod was used for purposes of divination.

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his images helped to hide all distinction between Hebrew and Canaanite beliefs, and greatly strengthened the power of idolatry in the land, for which cause he was afterward spoken of as "the man who made Israel to sin." All these facts show how deeply tainted with heathenism the worship of Jehovah had become. The spiritual side of the work of Moses was for the time being almost lost. It remained for the prophets to rediscover and complete it.

Corruption from Abroad.—So far we have spoken of the evil influence of the former inhabitants, especially the Canaanites; but as the nation developed it came into contact with other races, and these also helped to shape its religious history. The monarchy was established as the only way of meeting the repeated attacks of the Philistines. All the other oppressors mentioned in Judges were defeated once and for all by some desperate effort under a great leader, but the Philistines retired only to come again. Year after year they renewed their inroads, until at last the Hebrews chose a permanent leader, under whose continual guidance they should be able to deal effectively with their foes. Thus Saul was chosen king, and seems to have carried out well his patriotic task. David followed him in the kingship, still in troubled times, and was so successful as a warrior that he made Israel a large and

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powerful nation. David, however, in his adventurous career, was glad at times to make friends with other rulers. Solomon, his more statesmanlike son and successor, formed a strong alliance with the Phoenicians whose land lay to the north of Palestine. His son Rehoboam came to the throne about 940 B.C. Immediately northern Israel revolted and set up a separate kingdom under Jeroboam, leaving only two of the twelve tribes to the kingdom of Judah. From that time onward we find the kings of these little states constantly turning for support to one and another of the neighbouring rulers. Such alliances were natural to men who trusted in man rather than God, but like all faithless acts they had disastrous consequences. They opened the door to fresh influences of a heathen kind. Solomon, having married foreign wives, allowed them to bring heathen priests and practise their religions in Jerusalem. The kings of the North, following Jeroboam in his idolatry, did not hesitate to let the nations with which they were friendly send their priests and idols into the land. And so it came to pass that when King Ahab married Jezebel, a princess of Tyre, he allowed her to do what she liked in the matter of religion.

Jezebel's Persecution.—Now Jezebel was a strong-minded woman, with a great desire to glorify the faith of her own people. She therefore set to work,

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not only to build a temple where she herself might worship her Tyrian god, Baal, but also to compel the Israelites to worship him. The priests at the sanctuaries of Jehovah had either to adopt and practise this foreign Baal-worship along with their own worship of Jehovah, or to be turned out and have their places taken by priests from Jezebel's country. Most of them readily agreed to the new demands. The people, already corrupted with idolatry, willingly tolerated the addition of a form of religion which had behind it the influence of the royal house. But there were some who opposed the new idolatry, who would not put Baal beside Jehovah; and these were ruthlessly persecuted. The worship of Jehovah, as such, Jezebel did not mind; but when the servants of Jehovah refused to tolerate her Baal, then she showed no mercy. Thus persecution raged. As Elijah put it in his prayer: "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy Covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword."

Failure of the Priests.—The readiness with which the Tyrian Baal-worship was adopted in the sanctuaries brings us to what was the greatest tragedy of all in the religious life of Israel: the failure of her priests. The very men to whom was given the task of teaching and preserving the worship of Jehovah

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proved unfaithful. Often, like the sons of Eli, they turned their sacred office into a means of exacting money from the worshippers. And when dark days of persecution came, and the ruling classes turned to corrupt ways, usually the priests were the first to follow, uttering no rebuke; and even outraging God's temples by setting up in them the idols of the heathen. Instead of resisting courtly influence and popular clamour, they pandered to the weaknesses of high and low. The priesthood, which ought to have been the most ennobling influence in Israel, was the chief instrument of her corruption.

PRESERVATION OF THE NATIONAL FAITH

The God of the Race.—The wonder is that, with all these influences fighting against their faith, the Israelites continued to worship Jehovah at all. The chief reason why they did so was that they looked up to Jehovah as the God of their race. The Baalim might be the gods of the hills and valleys where the Hebrews had come to live, but the nation belonged to Jehovah. Their national customs were based on this faith. Jehovah had given them their laws. Every man among them had been consecrated in childhood to the God of his fathers. Even when they worshipped the idols of the land or of foreigners,

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they still clung to the notion that in a special sense Jehovah was the God of their race, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." It was this faith which in the times of the Judges enabled them to break the yoke of many a tyrant. It was the one bond of union between the scattered tribes. And although in times of peace they might forget their duties to Jehovah, there was always some sacred place where the attempt was made to worship Him according to the commandments of Moses.

Revival. 'Schools of Prophets.'—A new zeal for the religion of Jehovah was created, however, toward the close of the period of the Judges. It was probably a result of the Philistine oppression. We have already seen how this tyranny led to the establishment of the monarchy, but before Saul was called to the throne it had already produced another and very different result. It excited among the Israelites a warm religious and patriotic enthusiasm. Companies of men called 'bands' or 'schools' of prophets began to traverse the country, often in a state of ecstasy, rousing the people in the name of Jehovah to throw off the Philistine yoke. We may liken them to bands of Mohammedan dervishes preaching a holy war. The fact is, the long-drawn-out struggle of the Judges period was teaching Israel

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the value of its faith. God revealed Himself to the nation through its sufferings and needs, as well as through the lips of the prophets. In the dark ages of conflict and oppression the Hebrews were being taught to appreciate the things of God, and the prophetic bands were signs of this deepening appreciation. It appears that Samuel, though not himself a member of such a band, had some influence in this movement, and attached 'schools of the prophets' to religious centres like Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal, and set them to proclaim the duties of faith in Jehovah. Thus there arose a movement which definitely aimed at leading Israel back from the idolatries of the Baalim to a purer religion. We know very little about these schools, but we find them later associated with Elijah and Elisha, and it was probably their members who most bitterly opposed the foreign Baal-worship of Jezebel, and suffered most in the persecution she directed against those who refused to bow to her god.

False Prophets.—In later times these schools of the prophets became a professional class, and were often the worst enemies of the true prophets. This was when they had become popular, and men joined them for the sake of earning a living. Then they prophesied 'smooth things' to please the people, took bribes, and were well described as 'false pro-

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phets.' But in the early part of their history they served a great purpose: for they lit the lamp of prophecy in a dark age, and gave their support to a number of mighty, prophetic leaders. These outstanding prophets were distinguished from the others by the title 'seer' or 'man of God.' But gradually these titles dropped out of use and the word prophet was applied only to the exceptional man with a special message.

Work of the Great Prophets.—The attempts of the prophetic bands to arouse Israel by appealing to the national faith in Jehovah did much good, but it is in the light of the efforts of the great prophets to destroy the corrupting influences of heathenism that we shall understand the real task of prophecy. When the people turned to idolatry, and the priests encouraged what they ought to have resisted, God sent His prophets to wrestle with both priests and people. He called them from all classes: some were priests who had not, like the rest, disgraced their calling by becoming time-servers; others were prominent statesmen; others again were farmers. A group of men more unlike one another could scarcely be imagined. But they were all alike in this: that they loved God more than their own lives, and because they loved Him and lived near to Him, God put His thoughts into their hearts and made

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them see how terrible would be the consequences if the people continued in their sins. Then, when they felt this so keenly that they could no longer refrain from speech, they uttered their burning message. They came forward as the champions of the national faith against all heathen practices and idolatry. In the name of Jehovah they denounced or directed the conduct even of kings. They attacked the time-serving priests. They especially sought to destroy false ideas of Jehovah by showing that righteousness was the requirement of the national Covenant with Him and the chief condition of His favour. To stem the tide of corrupt religion, to denounce faithless priests, to rebuke wicked kings and princes, to expose unrighteousness wherever they found it, to warn the nation of the consequences of its sin, and to summon one and all to repent and turn to the LORD—this was the task of prophecy.

To that great work God called in ancient Israel a long line of heroes, the equal of whom the world has never known. Such were Samuel who called Saul to the throne; Nathan and Gad who rebuked David; Ahijah who denounced the sins of Jeroboam; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all those whose names are familiar in the titles of their prophecies. Such also was the great Elijah, the God-appointed scourge of Ahab's house and the untiring foe of foreign idol-worship.

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Elijah an Example.—The great effort at Carmel was but the supreme crisis in a life of the kind we have been describing. Elijah stood alone because the priests, who ought to have fought that battle, had weakened Jehovah's cause by making room for Baal. He stood there to struggle in the name of God against the corrupt influence of the royal family, against the time-serving spirit of the priesthood, and against the indifference of the nation. The next day he had to flee for his life from the murderous vengeance of Jezebel. But he had not failed. He had sounded aloud in Israel once more the rallying cry of faith in the God of their fathers. He had startled the national conscience into newness of life. He had made Israel feel afresh the hollowness of her idols and the majesty and might of Jehovah. He had attempted and, for the time, nobly achieved the task of prophecy.

CHAPTER III

WRITINGS AND THE WRITING PROPHETS

1. AMOS AT BETHEL

What the Story Emphasizes

2. THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

Foretelling *not* the Main Purpose

The Prophets were Preachers of Righteousness to their Own Times

They were Limited by the Ideas of their Age

Their Teaching a Gradual Growth

The Temporary and the Timeless in their Teaching

3. PROPHETIC WRITINGS

Amos Writes His Book. Power of a Book

Other Prophetic Writers 'Historical' and 'Writing' Prophets

4. OTHER EARLY WRITINGS

Books which are Known to have been in Use

Books since Incorporated in the Bible

Fulfilment of Amos's Prediction

OPEN a map of Palestine and find Bethel on the northern boundary of Benjamin, ten miles due north of Jerusalem. If your map shows the old roads you will see that Bethel is a place on which many highways converge. To the south runs that to Jerusalem, and branching from this, westward, is the main route to the coast at Joppa. To the east we have the way through Michmash to

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Jericho in the Jordan valley. To the north-west is another highway to the coast plain through Gophna. Due north, along the main mountain ridge, runs the great road to Shechem, Galilee, and Syria, and at the time of which we shall speak in this chapter, this was the most important of all, for it was the direct route past Gilgal and Shiloh and through Shechem—all places with great memories—to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, some twenty-seven miles distant.

A Sacred Festival about 760 B.C.—Along those roads and over the fields between, one bright morning in the far past, might have been seen groups of people, hurrying with the eagerness of those who hasten to some long anticipated pleasure. They were men, women, and children, but the great majority were men: for the crowds were great and the weak or timid held back. Occasionally the groups were varied by riders on asses coming in from the more distant villages, or by a caravan which had travelled for days. It was very like the gathering of an English crowd for some annual festival or fair, when shows and games of all sorts abound and acrobats perform before delighted audiences. In view of this, it may seem strange to say that these people were going to a religious ceremony. Yet such was the case.

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A great and sacred festival was the occasion, and the travellers were pilgrims. But at that time this people mixed with their religion all the amusements they loved and most of their vices, turning holy feasts into seasons of exciting pleasure and wickedness. Many took advantage of this to make money by catering for the lowest passions. Worst of all, the temple priests and city rulers looked on with indifference, and shared in the ill-gotten gains.

Quickly the crowds assembled for the ceremony, and the temple became thronged. The Bible does not describe the scene in detail, but we can imagine what happened. Before the priests appeared, a man pushed his way to the front, ascended the steps leading up to the altar, and turned to confront the sea of astonished faces. He bore no traces of official position. He wore no priestly robe. A farmer's cloak hung from his shoulder, and the long naked arm, which he stretched out as he began an impassioned speech, was bronzed with exposure to wind and sun. "Who is that?" "What's he doing up there?" ran the eager and half-indignant questions, and from a few scattered among the thousands the answer quickly spread, "It is Amos, the prophet, who has been preaching through the countryside that God is angry and is going to punish us." But

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question and answer died away as every ear was strained to catch the fiery words of the man on the altar steps.

A Prophet's Address.—"Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel," he began.¹ "An adversary there shall be even round about the land: and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled. It is true that you are God's chosen nation, but you are not living as God's people should, and Jehovah is saying, Shall two walk together except they have agreed? Hear this word, ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that afflict the just, that take a bribe, that turn aside the needy in the gate from his right; thus saith the LORD: As the shepherd rescueth out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued that sit in Samaria in the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed.

"Vain are your pilgrimages while your lives are full of sin. It is easy to come to Bethel and bring sacrifices, but Jehovah asks for righteousness, not ritual. 'I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Woe to

¹ The speech here given is simply a free treatment of the prophet's teaching, mainly composed of extracts.

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them that are at ease in Zion; that lie upon beds of ivory, and eat the lambs out of the flock; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.' Your soulless luxury God will reward with ruin, slavery, and death. The day of judgment is at hand. For escape there is but one way: it is the way of repentance. Seek ye me, and ye shall live. Let judgment roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream."

The prophet went on to say that, although he had proclaimed this message to many, the people were at ease, and took no notice of his call. Therefore he had come that day to interrupt their empty service and make them listen to God.¹ Already judgment had begun. The plague of locusts after the king's mowings was one of God's punishments, but he had prayed for them and God had held back the greater doom. Then God had sent a summer of such great heat that it seemed as if the very earth would be burned; but again he, the prophet, had prayed for them, and God had still withheld the final overthrow. But now he saw God standing with the plumb-line, testing Israel's building, and, finding it all out of truth, pronouncing doom even upon the royal family. "I will not pass by them any more. The high places of Isaac shall be

¹ For what follows see Amos vii.

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desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

The Priest Intervenes.—Thus Amos prophesied. But at this point there was an interruption. The priests of the temple had so far kept quiet, awed by the striking earnestness of the prophet, yet resentful of his interference and his attacks upon their services and sanctuary. They waited, too, as their kind waited around Jesus in later times, hoping he would say something for which they could get him imprisoned. When at last he mentioned the king's name and prophesied evil of the reigning house, they thought their opportunity had come. Amaziah, the chief priest of the Bethel sanctuary, sent to the king, who was probably staying in the city at the time, telling him what Amos had said, and craftily exaggerating his words so as to make the king more angry with the prophet. Then Amaziah hurried forward into the temple, stepped up beside Amos, and with words of abuse ordered him out of the building, using language intended to make the people think that Amos was only a professional prophet, making money by preaching, and threatening him with punishment from the rulers for interfering at the king's sanctuary.

This is a scene to be remembered. We picture

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the royal temple splendidly ornamented and furnished, with the metal bull set up by Jeroboam as an image of Jehovah, and with the Asherah ¹ and other emblems copied from Canaanitish idol-worship standing beside the altar. We see the vast audience, swayed by the emotions kindled by the searching message of the prophet, and excited almost beyond control now that the priest had interfered, ready to tear to pieces either Amos or Amaziah, whichever should arouse their animosity the most. We watch in the sombre half-light the two men facing each other on the steps of the altar. We note also how Amaziah, with sneers at Amos as a crust-hunter and mere outsider, and with references to the splendour of the sanctuary and the royal favour it enjoys, is cunningly turning the feeling of the crowd against the prophet.

The Doom of Amaziah.—What will Amos do? Will he submit or will he try to turn the crowd to his side? He does neither: for above the people and the priest he sees the LORD standing over the altar, with his avenging arm stretched out over Amaziah, condemning in this man the spirit which has dragged Israel into sin. Thrilled by this awful vision, Amos speaks again: “I was no prophet,

¹ The Asherah was a sacred tree or pole set up near an altar for some symbolic purpose. It was probably a survival of tree-worship, but some think it was an emblem of a Canaanitish goddess.

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neither was I a prophet's son; but the LORD took me from following the flock and said, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore, Amaziah, hear thou the word of the LORD: thy wife shall be cast out in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou thyself shalt die in a land that is unclean, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land." Such was the awful answer which Amos gave to the man who thought to frighten him with threats, an answer which, with all its terror, simply embodies what was in those ages the usual consequences of defeat in war. Then Amos turned, and with these terrible words ringing in the ears of priest and people he moved out of the temple, silenced yet conquering.

Insistence on Morality.—We have lingered over this scene because it brings out so well the real character of Hebrew prophecy. Elijah showed us the prophet's task, but Amos shows us, even better than Elijah, how that task was generally attempted and what it involved. Here, as in the earlier case, we have the condemnation of the rulers, the attack on faithless priests, and the rebuke of the sinful nation. But in Amos there rings out sharp and clear that demand for righteousness, sincerity, and earnestness of life, that insistence upon morality,

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which is somewhat hidden in the story of Elijah, but which is the special characteristic of Hebrew prophecy.

THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

Foretelling Secondary.—A very common error about the prophets is to suppose that their chief business was to foretell events. Amos shows us at once that this is wrong, and that we must put this notion right out of our minds if we are to understand their great work. It is true that Amos foretold the coming destruction of Israel; but that was only the punishment he saw would overtake the nation unless they repented and reformed. His real aim was to secure that reformation. There is nothing in the book of Amos about the coming of Jesus Christ, or about the Kingdom of God, or about the end of the world; and these are the subjects we expect men to talk about who deal with the future. If to foretell Christ had been the main business of a prophet we should have to say that Amos was not one, neither was Jeremiah, nor Ezekiel, nor Hosea, nor any of the older ones such as Elisha or Samuel, for the chief interest of all these was with their own times. So let us put the notion of foretelling in at least a secondary place, and understand that if it come into a prophet's work at all it is not to be regarded as his main purpose.

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Preachers of Righteousness.—How, then, are we to think of the prophets? We must think of them as preachers of righteousness to the people of their own times. They opposed heathen religions in the interests of the national faith; they also opposed false forms of the national religion, and tried to show the true character of God and the kind of life and worship He required. In Amos we have a great example of this. When, in the name of Jehovah, the prophet said: "I hate, I despise your feasts," he was helping to destroy the false belief that as long as they offered certain sacrifices they could do anything they liked. Similarly, when he declared that God was about to overthrow the nation, he was pulling to pieces the false idea that Jehovah could not do without them. For they thought themselves the only people that belonged to their God, and that for His own sake He was bound to save them from their enemies: whereas Amos knew that God ruled all the nations, and would not save them from anything unless they repented of their sins. Thus we see the prophet as a preacher of righteousness, revealing a truer knowledge of God, and demanding from the nation a life more worthy of the God they professed to serve.

The World they knew.—In the next place we see that the prophet's work was limited by the ideas of his age. He had to teach men whose clothes, food,

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streets, shops, games, tools, hours of labour, language, weights, measures, and nearly all the things they used, were utterly different from ours. Consequently they thought differently about things, and since they could not possibly have understood some things which are perfectly plain to us, they had to be taught accordingly. They had no newspapers or railways. Their education was exceedingly meagre. They knew nothing of Europe, America, Australia, the Chinese Empire, and the greater part of Africa; they thought that the world was a big island in a vast ocean, and that the sun went round the earth instead of the earth going round the sun. Politically they were a small people, and although prosperous in Amos's day, they often suffered great privations and cruel tyranny from stronger foes. Of settled government like ours they knew nothing. If the king happened to be a good man, he saw that something like justice was done; generally, however, he was too selfish or too busy to bother about it, and the weakest went to the wall. The low character of their religion we have already seen. All these facts, then, and many others like them, made their thoughts and ways, their whole life, strangely unlike ours.

The Prophets were limited.—Now the prophets were in the same position as their fellows, differing

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from the rest only in being better men, in seeing more clearly what God was like and what He required of His children. But much that is plain to us was beyond the comprehension even of great prophets. When God called them to their life task He held up before them, as He is ever holding up to men, the perfect truth, but the prophets could see it only in the light of the ideas in which they had been trained, and missed much of its splendid meaning. We shall often misunderstand the prophets unless we remember this limiting power of the ideas of their times. When, for example, they attacked rulers and kings, they were dealing with the men responsible for the misgovernment of the country, and never dreamt of a land where nearly every man would have a vote and help to rule. Nowadays those attacks would have to be made largely on the electors. And when Amos spoke in the name of Jehovah, he was not thinking of God as we think of our Heavenly Father, but according to the ideas he had learned from his youth, enlarged by what he had grasped of the revelation God had made to him.

Revelation a Gradual Growth.—Further, it is because of this limiting influence of the ideas of the time that the knowledge of God grew only gradually. Most of the prophets advanced a little on

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their predecessors, and each truth realized became a step from which something more could be seen. Amos did not see that God was a God of love; but Hosea, who came soon after, saw it.¹ Amos thought that God dealt with men as nations rather than as individuals, but Jeremiah saw the importance of the individual in God's sight, and Ezekiel made it plain that every man will be judged according to his own works. Thus the prophets laboured, as every man must, each under the limitations of his own age; fighting bravely their heroic battles amid the semi-darkness of those early times. And their greatness comes out in this: not that they knew all about God, but that they knew so much more than those about them, and dared to preach it in the teeth of misunderstanding, hatred, and cruel persecution; so that the Israelites were gradually uplifted by their ministry; and the whole world enriched with a fuller revelation of God.

Temporary and Timeless.—A third point to notice about the prophets follows from the former two, namely, that their message in part applied to their own time only, and in part to all times. Amos said that the plague of locusts and the drought were punishments for the sins of the nation; but this applies only to that particular plague and drought,

¹ See the whole prophecy, but especially chap. xi.

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and we should be wrong if we supposed, because of what Amos said, that every plague is a punishment. Such things may be sent to test and strengthen us. Again, Amos denounced the worship and sacrifices at Bethel; but this does not mean that worship and sacrifice are wrong, but only that they lose all value unless followed by righteous lives. On the other hand, when he denounced oppression, bribery, greed, and luxury, and showed that God hated and will punish these things, he was teaching something which is full of meaning and as greatly needed to-day as when he uttered it. Thus there are things in the prophets and other parts of the Bible which belong to the past, as well as the messages for ourselves, and the only way to distinguish them clearly is to love Christ and learn of Him. Our LORD was the fulfilment of prophecy, and therefore He is the test of what is passing and what is permanent in the prophetic message.

PROPHETIC WRITINGS

Amos writes his Book.—When Amos left the temple at Bethel, with its awestruck multitude and doomed priest, his opportunity for free speech was over. Henceforward he was a marked man and the temple gates were closed to him. But he had given

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his message to the nation in a way that could not be overlooked; and if he could no longer preach, there were other ways of pressing home the truth that burned in his heart. Like many another persecuted teacher since, Amos, when his voice was silenced, took up the pen. He returned to his home in Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and wrote a book. In this he put down the substance of what he had proclaimed in Israel, together with some thoughts from God concerning the surrounding nations. Among the books of our Bible there are quite a number of this kind, telling us some of the works and words of an inspired man; and among all these the book of Amos is the oldest. Amos was the first prophet to give us a book.

Now a book is a wonderful thing. Amos was a voice crying in the wilderness; but a voice, however strong, carries only a short way. Others may try to repeat what is said, but memories are weak, and mistakes soon creep in and spoil the message. A book, however, multiplies the voice, and carries it wherever its pages may travel. It lacks something of the thrill of the spoken word, but it is not so liable to error. It does not forget. And a book may be multiplied into many thousands of copies, and spread over many lands, and wherever it goes it carries the message of him whose words it bears.

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Further, a book makes the message permanent. Even if you could hear the man yourself, you could not remember all he said; but with a book the word is before you, and can be read again and again. The writer himself may die; centuries may come and go; but still in his book the message lives on, speaking to other times and people. If, as with Amos, he is a true prophet who suffered persecution, the time comes when men see that he is right, and honour him for his work. Thus through a book a man may conquer, whose spoken word was rejected. The pen is mightier than the sword, and when Amos penned his prophecies he put a new and mighty weapon into the hands of the prophets.

Historical and Writing Prophets.—This new weapon others were not slow to use. Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and most of the later prophets, each gave us a book, written either by himself or by his followers. And because they have given us books we distinguish them from the older prophets, like Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Elijah, and Elisha, who are known to us only as they are described in the histories. The histories in which they appear—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—are called ‘historical prophets,’ and the books written by prophets, as well as the prophets who wrote them, are known

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as the 'writing prophets.' This distinction is useful and should be remembered.¹

OTHER EARLY WRITINGS

Another interesting fact comes into view as we think of Amos writing his book. In order to do such a thing he must have been able to write, unless he employed some one to do the writing for him. In either case it shows that writing, and therefore reading, were not unusual things in his day. What books had they then, and what did the books contain? We know very little about it, but there are a few we can be sure of. There is one called *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*,² which may have been in existence quite a long time, and seems to have contained all sorts of stories of ancient fights. Another was *The Book of Jashar*,³ which may have been a collection of songs. Both these are mentioned as books used by the writers of the historical narratives in the Old Testament, and must be counted among the sources of their information.

The Primitive Document.—More important to us, however, is the fact that parts of some of the Old Testament books themselves were already in exist-

¹ Compare their position in the Hebrew Canon, page 109.

² See Numbers xxi. 14.

³ See Joshua x. 13 and 2 Samuel i. 18.

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ence. More than a hundred years before Amos, some one, we know not who, had collected together all the stories he could find about the origin and ancient life of the Israelitish nation, and had written them in a book. This man from the beginning nearly always used for God the national name Jehovah; we therefore call his book "the Jehovist Narrative" and Biblical scholars refer to it as J. A little later a similar collection of narratives was made by a man in another part of the country, who, up to the point in Exodus at which the Divine Name was revealed to Moses,¹ generally used for God the name Elohim. This writing is, therefore, called "the Elohist Narrative" and is referred to by scholars as E. It is probable that the former was written in the southern kingdom, and the latter in the northern; consequently the letters J and E are now frequently used as suggesting a Judean or Ephraimite origin. There are other differences between J and E, besides the use of names for God, but this is the most striking. Further, E did not contain all the same stories as J, and where the stories are the same it often gives different numbers and other details. At a later period, after the time of Amos, some one who possessed a copy of both, finding that the same story was so often told in each,

¹ Exodus iii. 13-15.

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thought it would be better to have one complete account, and therefore he put the two together into one narrative containing all the stories. Where the two differed in detail he did not know which was correct, and, like a sensible man, put down both.¹ This combination narrative we shall call the "Primitive Document": it is referred to by scholars as JE. It contained most of the best stories in the early books of the Bible: for example, the stories of Joseph. A book made in this way, by weaving together separate accounts, is called a composite work. There are many examples of compositeness in our Bible.

Not yet a Bible.—These books, then, in their early separate form, were in existence in the time of Amos, and one of them, if not both, was probably well known to him. But they were comparatively short, and nobody looked upon them as a Bible or sacred book. To us they are important because later they were taken up into the Bible, where they have become exceedingly precious. Doubtless there were also many other books in existence, such as the records kept at the royal court, and collections of laws and customs kept by priests and others. But enough has now been said to show that writing had already become a power, when in the middle of the

¹ Compare in Gen. xxii. verses 7-8 with 13-20.

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eighth century B.C. our brave Amos determined to make use of it in place of the voice that had been officially silenced.

Fulfilment of Amos's Prediction.—It was somewhere between 760 and 750 B.C. when Amos was driven from Bethel. Thirty years later his warnings received a terrible fulfilment. In 725 the northern kingdom was overrun and Samaria besieged by the Assyrians. The capital held out for three years, but in 722 it was taken.¹ The best of the people were transported to eastern countries. Their lands were given or sold to foreigners, who came in from Babylonia and Assyria to take their place. Hundreds were slain. All were robbed and impoverished. Northern Israel ceased to be a Hebrew land, and the ten tribes became wanderers, soon to be lost amid the millions of the nations to which they were driven. Prophets can be silenced, but that does not avert the disasters they foresee. The priests drove Amos from the temple, but their triumph was dearly bought. They could not stay the approaching doom, nor prevent the fulfilment of those awful words to Amaziah: "Thy land shall be divided by line; and thou thyself shalt die in a land that is unclean."

¹ See 2 Kings xvii. 5-6 and xviii. 9-22.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK

1. THE STORY OF THE DISCOVERY

Renewal of the Covenant after the Discovery
Josiah's Reforms

2. THE BOOK THAT WAS DISCOVERED

Its Identity

Its Origin—The Prophets of the 8th Century B.C.—Their
Followers—Manasseh's Persecution—The Book Written
by the Persecuted—and Hidden

3. CHIEF RESULTS OF THE DISCOVERY

The Suppression of the High Places
The Prophetic Interpretation of History
The Beginning of the Idea of the Bible
The Faith Independent of Priest and Land

RAVAGES of the Scythians.—The mighty empire of the Romans was broken to pieces in the fifth century of our era, not by the attack of organized armies, but by the inroads of hordes of Huns and Goths. In a similar manner, in the latter part of the seventh century B.C., the vast empire of Assyria was shaken by the onslaught of great bands of savage Scythians. They came from the lands about the Caspian Sea and overran the greater part of Western Asia. They pillaged and

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plundered the cities on the river Euphrates, and then came westward into Palestine. Strange to say they left the little kingdom of Judah untouched, but the Philistine cities on the coast were plundered, and the wild invaders pressed on to the very borders of Egypt.

Temple Restoration.—To the dwellers in Judah it was a time of terror and dismay. As the stories of rapine and murder reached their ears they felt the cloud of death hanging over them. In their midst were prophets, like Jeremiah and Zephaniah, both of whom belong to this time, who pointed to those terrible and savage raiders as a visitation from God on account of their sins. The people heard their message, knew in their hearts that they deserved the punishment, and trembled all the more. For the inhabitants of Judah had indulged in well-nigh every evil, and had even endeavoured with fire and sword to stamp out every remnant of pure faith in God that still lingered in the land. The blood of many martyrs cried aloud for vengeance. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that when the Scythians raged round their borders their guilty conscience doubled their alarm. They felt that judgment had come. In this distress they turned from their idols to Jehovah; and when the destroying flood passed by, leaving them unmolested, they thought that

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God had indeed heard their prayer. With a sudden burst of gratitude filling their hearts they looked around for some means of expressing their thankfulness, and the eyes of many rested on the temple at Jerusalem. For a long time this temple had been but little used or, worse still, had been desecrated by being employed for the worship of heathen idols. It had suffered much from neglect and spoliation. What could be more fitting, therefore, than that they should, as a thank-offering for their deliverance, restore the House of God to its former splendour? Thus it came to pass in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, about 621 B.C., that the neglected temple became once more an object of veneration, and money was contributed from all quarters to pay for its thorough repair.

Finding of the Book.—The workmen had been but a short time occupied with this task when one of those little things happened which sometimes unexpectedly turn the tide of history: they discovered in the temple a book. Perhaps it was in a cupboard which for a long time had not been opened. Perhaps it was in some out-of-the-way corner where it had been purposely hidden. Wherever it was, it came to light during the renovations. When examined by Hilkiab the priest it proved to be a book of the law. Hilkiab handed this book to

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Shaphan, an official of the court, who was so impressed with it that he felt it to be his duty to inform the king. So Shaphan took the book and read it to King Josiah, "and when the king heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes."¹

But the king could not leave the matter with a mere show of deep concern. The book contained things which haunted him. He realized that if its threats were carried out both he and his people would be utterly destroyed. He therefore sent Shaphan, Hilki'ah, and some other officers, to inquire of the LORD what they were to do; for, said he, "great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that is written concerning us." Then the officers came with their question to a prophetess, dwelling in Jerusalem, named Huldah; and her answer was that all the words of the book should be fulfilled. The children of Israel had forsaken Jehovah, had burned incense to other gods, and sinned so grievously that their punishment could not be averted. But, inasmuch as Josiah had repented, the evil should not fall in his day: he should die in peace. "And they brought the king word again."

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 11.

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The Covenant Renewed.—Now King Josiah was a good man, and it grieved him terribly to think that his kingdom must shortly suffer destruction. He therefore decided to do all that a king could to make Judah a better land, and to fulfil the newly discovered law. He called all the leading men of the nation to Jerusalem, and there, with all the people of the capital, all the priests and prophets, they held a solemn service in the temple. To this great gathering the king read “all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.” When he had read it he stood on a platform before all the people, and promised for himself and the whole nation, “to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart and with all his soul, to confirm the words of the covenant that were written in this book.” Then the people joined in. They took the king’s promise and made it their own. They “stood to the covenant.”

Josiah’s Reforms.—Having thus solemnly pledged the nation, Josiah actively set about the work of reform. All the vessels in the temple which had been made for the worship of Baal, of the Asherah, and the stars, were burned outside the city, and the ashes carried all the way to Bethel. He put an end to the work of the priests at all the high places

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throughout the land and defiled or destroyed their shrines. These high places were the usual centres of worship for the Israelites down to this time. They were generally situated on the outskirts of a city, were accepted as satisfactory in early times, and were supported by Samuel, Solomon, and others. Most of them had been shrines of the Canaanites before the Hebrews possessed the land. In addition to the altar, the symbolic pillar and the asherah were allowed to remain, and these symbols of the old corrupt Baal-worship naturally helped to bring the customs of the Canaanitish idolatry into the worship of Jehovah. It was because of this corrupt tendency that the high places were denounced by the prophets from Amos onward and finally abolished. Josiah also had the images in the temple burnt to powder and the dust scattered in the cemetery. He stopped the worship of Molech¹ with its cruel practice of making a child pass through the fire. He took away the horses and burned the chariots of the Sun, and destroyed the altars on the roof of the palace, which had been used for the worship of that and other heavenly bodies. He

¹ Molech was a deity widely worshipped among the non-Israelitish peoples of Palestine and kindred races, frequently also by the Israelites themselves, especially in the later days of the monarchy. The most prominent feature of this cult was the cruel custom of sacrificing children as burnt offerings, and for this reason it was especially condemned.

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also put away all those who had familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the teraphim.¹ In these and other ways Josiah tried to get rid of every sign and symbol of heathen religion, to make the worship of Jehovah the one religion of the land, and to centralize that worship in the one great temple at Jerusalem. The work was crowned by an impressive celebration of the Passover, concerning which the writer of Kings says: "Surely there was not kept such a passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." Amid the rejoicings of that great feast it seemed as if Israel had at last returned unto the LORD. But the pulling down of idols is one thing; the turning of the people in love and obedience to God is another. The words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel show that Josiah's reforms did not greatly improve the nation. Judah was too deeply sunk in vice to be purified by any external changes, however extensive and well meant.

¹ The teraphim were household deities which probably represented the ancestors of the home. They were supposed to act as an oracle and give guidance. Naturally, therefore, their use is constantly coupled, in Scripture, with the practice of magic and soothsaying. See Gen. xxxi. 19 and 30, 1 Sam. xix. 13.

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THE BOOK THAT WAS DISCOVERED

Its Identity.—Let us now turn to two questions of the deepest interest, namely: what was the book which created all this stir, and how did it come to be hidden in the temple? As to what the book was, there can be little doubt. It was short enough to be read through at a meeting. It denounced very strongly the neglect of the covenant with Jehovah. It demanded the suppression of all heathen worship, and especially the worship of the ‘host of heaven.’ It required the concentration of worship at the Temple at Jerusalem, and the putting down of all the high places. It prohibited the practices of wizards and diviners. Finally, it called for the celebration of the Feast of the Passover. There is only one book in the Bible which fits into all these facts: it is the book of Deuteronomy; and we shall be safe in regarding the original book of Deuteronomy¹ as the book which was found in the House of the LORD by Hilkiyah the priest.

Eighth-Century Prophets.—The answer to the second question—how did the book come to be hidden in the temple?—is to be found in a great story of prophecy and persecution. We studied in our last

¹ It has since been lengthened by the addition of eleven chapters, viz. chaps. i.-iv., xxvii., and xxix.-xxxiv.

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chapter the work of Amos in the northern kingdom, and saw how he became the first of the writing prophets. Soon after him there arose in northern Israel another, and perhaps even greater prophet—Hosea—the man who was the first to make known the greatest of all truths, that Jehovah is a God of love. Before Hosea had finished his work in the north, Isaiah, the statesman-prophet whose courage kept Judah from failing in two great national struggles, was giving to Jerusalem a new vision of God.¹ Then, in 725 B.C., came the Assyrian invasion of the northern state, followed by the siege and destruction of Samaria, the capital, and the carrying off of ten tribes into the many places where they became scattered and lost. The shock of this fearful disaster was felt throughout Judah, and Isaiah used it as the ground of further appeals to his countrymen. About this time Micah² appeared, and added his influence to the cause of righteousness.

Manasseh's Persecution.—Such mighty men, inspired of God, and fighting for the right with unexampled courage, could not fail to move many hearts. Most of the people were sunk in vice, yet numbers responded to the prophetic preaching and turned in penitence to God. In this way Isaiah was

¹ For typical passages read Isa. i., vi., xxviii., xxx., xxxiii.

² Read especially Mic. iii., vi.

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able to speak of "my disciples," and a very noble, though by no means large, revival took place. But King Hezekiah, whose influence had been a great help to Isaiah, died in 695 B.C., and was succeeded by one of the worst kings that Judah ever had, his son Manasseh. The latter came to the throne at twelve years of age and reigned fifty-five years; and from the time he became old enough to think and act for himself, he lived a dissolute life, mocked the reformers, encouraged every form of idolatry and corrupt religion, and finally tried to exterminate the religion of Jehovah by a cruel persecution of its adherents. Had Isaiah lived, his great influence might have held Manasseh in check, but he was an old man and must have died when Manasseh was still a youth. No other personality of sufficient strength arose to restrain him, and he plunged the nation deeper and deeper into sin. Nor was the king alone to blame. Hezekiah had made a vigorous attempt to put down the high places in the country, which were notorious for their wickedness, and to make religion purer by centralizing the worship in Jerusalem.¹ But this angered a great many of the people, and as soon as the tide of authority turned under Manasseh's vicious rule they eagerly took advantage of it, rejoicing in the downfall of the religion of Jehovah, restoring the

¹ See 2 Kings xviii. 4 and 22.

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high places of the idols, and spreading a popular reaction against the teaching of the prophets, which quickly developed into a persecution of their followers. Jerusalem was filled with the blood of innocent men. Martyrs suffered for their faith. The best men of Judah were destroyed by their own people. As Jeremiah put it: "Your own sword hath devoured your prophets like a destroying lion."

The Book Written.—When martyrs are multiplied, true religion is driven underground; but it is not destroyed. The followers of the prophets, like the Covenanters of a later age, met in secret places; and being no longer allowed to preach their convictions, they began to write them. Before this, Amos, when silenced by corrupt officials, had taken up the pen. Now these poor persecuted people, with love for Jehovah burning in their hearts, and the teachings of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah kindling their minds, began a work for God which shall not cease to bring forth fruit as long as Christianity lives in the earth. Moses had committed the law to the priests,¹ and throughout the intervening centuries the people had known but little of it. These followers of the prophets, however, knew it, and determined to give it to the people, that it might counteract, to some extent, the influence of their

¹ See Deut. xxxi. 9, 26.

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idolatrous priests. But they did not write a bare list of the laws. They set forth the laws of Moses in the earnest and moving language of their prophetic leaders, pointed them with appeals to God's love and deliverances, backed them with terrible warnings of the consequences that would follow neglect, and applied them to the sins of their own time. We have called these men followers of the prophets, but in reality they were prophets themselves, prophets who, being unable to speak, uttered their message by setting the evils and needs of the hour in the light of the Mosaic law.

Hidden and Found.—But when their book was written, what could they do with it? If their enemies found it the writing would be destroyed, and Israel would be no better for their efforts. If it were found in their possession they themselves would be destroyed as well. So they adopted the plan (perhaps God guided them to it in answer to prayer) of hiding it in the temple, hoping that sooner or later it would be discovered and allowed to speak its message. For twenty, thirty, it may have been sixty years, for we cannot determine exactly when it was written, it lay in that secret place. Then the hope of its writers was fulfilled: the book was found. A new and better king listened to its solemn and earnest words. Its prophetic appeal succeeded where

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the power of great kings had failed. Its teaching formed the basis of a great reform. The holy covenant was renewed. The book became the law of a nation.

CHIEF RESULTS OF THE DISCOVERY

Suppression of the High Places.—From the discovery of this book there flowed three far-reaching results. First, we have the immediate suppression of the high places, and the centralization of worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Solomon had sought something of this kind. Hezekiah had tried to enforce it. But what these had failed to do Josiah accomplished, not because he was Josiah, but because he was backed by the book of Deuteronomy. Statesmen desired this centralization, because it was the only way in which the nation could be really united; and they must have desired it all the more in the days of Isaiah, when they saw the ten tribes of the north swept away into captivity. But the rulers had never been able to get rid of the high places, because they had too firm a hold on the affections of the people. For ages the priest and the local shrine had been woven into their lives. The people did not know the law, but the priest did; and they turned to him to settle every dispute.

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These local high places and their priests were deeply influenced by idolatry. They were the successors of the old Canaanitish Baal-worship, and often utterly corrupt. Yet they represented the religious life and associations of the surrounding population, which clung to them tenaciously. When, however, these people were confronted with Deuteronomy the case was different. It spoke in the name of the very Moses to whom the priest appealed, and showed the priest to be in the wrong. Its laws were largely old and familiar, though many had been forgotten or ignored, but in this book they lived in the very spirit of Moses. The moral passion and vehemence of that great leader burst out afresh in the zeal of these disciples of the prophets, and swept away every barrier. Within a year the high places were trodden down, and the people in all parts of the country were learning to look for light and inspiration to the holy city. But, alas, the men who might have been the backbone of this movement had been martyred; it depended on the king, who did his best, but was not able to transform the daily life of the nation.

Prophetic View of History.—The second important result of the discovery is the influence the book of Deuteronomy exerted over the writings of the period immediately following. This influence is so

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deep that any scholar versed in the art of distinguishing the styles of authors could pick out the Old Testament books written under its influence simply by the likeness of their language. Although concerned chiefly with laws, there is nothing formal or legal in its wording. It deals with them in the smooth, full, eloquent utterance and impassioned manner of a great orator. This style, easily distinguished in the writers who caught its note, is well illustrated in the book of Joshua. The influence of Deuteronomy on literature, however, was not wholly a matter of words and phrases. Still more powerfully were men affected by its point of view. It taught them to judge the present in the light of the past. It looked at the nation's history as the working out of God's will, especially of His will as expressed in their national covenant with Jehovah. The prosperity that had come to them was the reward of faithfulness; their distresses were punishments for forsaking God. Everything in the historical books of Kings, and we may add Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, is looked at in this way. They give us the prophetic interpretation of history, and that prophetic standpoint, found in so many of the books written just before and during the Exile, marks the influence of Deuteronomy.

The Idea of the Bible.—Lastly, we have what was

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destined to be the greatest of all the results due to this discovery, the beginning of the idea of the Bible, that is, of a book which is a standard of duty because of its having divine authority. Now that sense of authority in the Bible began with this discovery. Never before, in the attempts to reform Israel, had appeal been made to the authority of a book. Samuel did not appeal to one, neither did Nathan when he reproved David, nor Solomon when he consecrated the temple, nor Elijah when he denounced the sins of the house of Ahab. Even when Hezekiah attempted to destroy the high places, so far as we know he made no use of the statements of a writing. The great prophets, whose work was completed before this discovery was made—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah—similarly made no appeal to a Bible. With God's commandments and laws they were fairly familiar, but not with a book of the law generally known and recognized as possessing authority. When, however, Deuteronomy appeared, the new attitude was at once adopted. The message of a prophet was freely criticised by those to whom he spoke, because he was not recognized as Jehovah's spokesman. But Moses was so recognized; and here was a book that challenged them in the name and spirit of Moses, that confronted them with the curse of a broken covenant, that brought history

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to witness against their sins, that demanded heart-felt penitence and stern reform. They found themselves, in this book, standing at the bar of Jehovah and in the presence of an unchanging Judge.

The Faith made Independent.—Thus a new light, the lamp of God's word, shone forth. It appeared at the right moment. Before the men who had seen that book brought out of the temple had passed away, the little kingdom of Judah was trampled in the dust by the armies of Babylonia. The political freedom of Judah came to an end. Jerusalem was razed to the ground, the Temple destroyed by fire, and the sacrifices on her altar ceased. It looked as if the Hebrew people, with their splendid vision of God and wretched disobedience, were swept away for ever. But before the destroying army trampled over the land, God prepared for the preservation of that which was best in Israel. He had so worked that they were no longer dependent on priest and temple, on land and king. Their faith and hope were now expressed in a writing, which they could carry to the ends of the earth. Judah had witnessed the birth of the Bible.

CHAPTER V

THE EXILE AND THE BOOK OF THE LAW

1. THE EXILE

Babylon—Its Size and Magnificence
Destruction of Jerusalem, 586 B.C. The Exiles

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE EXILE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ministry of Ezekiel. The Synagogue
New Religious Patriotism and Hope of a Return
Collection and Putting Together of Writings

3. THE RETURN, 537 B.C.

Its Prophet. The Return and Restored Sacrifices
Temple Rebuilding—Haggai and Zechariah—completed
516 B.C.
Difficulties of Returned Exiles—Malachi

4. THE BOOK OF THE LAW

Ezra brings the completed Pentateuch, 458 B.C.
Nehemiah Restores Jerusalem's Walls, 445 B.C.
Ezra Publishes the Book of the Law, 444 B.C.
The Jewish Canon and the Samaritan Pentateuch.
Babylon and Jerusalem

CLOSE to the river Euphrates, some fifty miles south of Bagdad, a group of hillocks breaks the general flatness of the country. The river here is fringed with date-palms, beyond which lie gardens, often marshy and fit only for rice-growing, and large patches of uncultivated desert.

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The mounds reach to heights varying from twenty-five to seventy feet, and stretch from north to south over a distance of five miles. For centuries the wind has swept over them the sand of the desert; yet those mounds cover the remains of what was in many respects the most wonderful city the world has ever known: they show the site of buried Babylon.

Great Babylon.—In the days of Nebuchadnezzar's power this great city was extended and beautified and strengthened. It stood on both banks of the Euphrates, by which it was divided into two almost equal parts. Two walls were built round it, enclosing a vast square. Each of the four walls was pierced by twenty-five gates, and roads ran right across the city from gate to gate, dividing it into squares like a huge draughtboard. These roads were fifteen miles long, so that the walls enclosed an area of two hundred and twenty-five square miles. The County of London covers an area of one hundred and seventeen square miles, which is only just over one half the size of ancient Babylon. The city walls were not of stone, but artificial hills: immense ramparts three hundred feet high, and broad enough on the top for several chariots to drive abreast. Higher still rose the turrets of two hundred and fifty towers, which, standing at intervals along the walls, completed the defences of this gigantic fortress.

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The magnificence of the buildings matched the strength of the fortifications. Chief among them was the temple of Bel, which rose in seven huge terraced storeys to the amazing height of six hundred feet, each storey being dedicated to one of the heavenly bodies and coloured accordingly : gold for the Sun, silver for the Moon, azure for Mercury, and so on. At the top stood the shrine of Nebo, one of the greatest of the Babylonian gods. Another feature of great splendour was the Palace Royal. It stood in spacious gardens, had many high towers and innumerable rooms, and was adorned with costly works of art. Still more notable were the 'hanging gardens,' for which Babylon was famed throughout antiquity as one of the seven wonders of the world. These gardens were constructed and laid out in the most beautiful manner to produce the effects, precious in a land so flat and uninteresting, of hill and dale, fountain and cascade, enriched with foliage and flowers. In addition to these special buildings, there were all the great works connected with the system of canals, tunnels, and lakes by which the city was watered and adorned, as well as all the three- or four-storied dwellings and commercial houses. Shall we wonder that the great emperor, who did most for the proper laying out of the city, should proudly boast of it: "Is not this great

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Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty? ”¹

Destruction of Jerusalem.—It was this Nebuchadnezzar who, in 597 B.C., twenty-four years after the discovery of the law book, overran Jerusalem, plundered the Temple, and carried away the flower of the population into Babylonia. Ten years later he came again, angry at a revolt of the city against his rule, and after being kept outside the walls for eighteen months inflicted a terrible vengeance. All the principal buildings, including the Temple, were sacked and burned; the walls were razed to the ground; the king's sons were put to death before their father's eyes, and he was then blinded and sent in fetters to Babylon, where he died in prison; the chief officers and leading men also were executed; the vessels of the sanctuary were taken and added to the fabulous treasures stored in the temple of Bel; and every man and woman of the population that was worth taking was driven in woeful captivity over the seven hundred miles of road that separate Jerusalem from Babylon.²

Condition of the Exiles.—We must, however, beware of thinking of the Jews in Babylon as languishing in chains and slavery. The earlier company

¹ Daniel iv. 30.

² See 2 Kings xxiv. 10–xxv. 22.

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of exiles, including all the nobility, was settled in various parts of the country, and put to develop the land or engage in commerce, as they might find best for themselves. Many were taken into the army and other branches of the emperor's service. Doubtless the later captives were treated with far less consideration. Most of them were set to toil on the great engineering and building works in the capital and elsewhere, and any not required for those imperial undertakings were probably sold into a mild form of slavery. But on the whole they enjoyed considerable freedom. They were allowed to worship according to their own customs, as far as that was possible in a foreign land. They formed communities and appointed elders, very much as they had done in the towns of Judah. Prosperity in business came to many, and some, among whom were Daniel and Nehemiah, rose to positions of great responsibility and influence at the court. Their one restraint was that they were not permitted to leave the country: whatever liberties they enjoyed, and whatever prosperity they might attain, the fact remained that they were exiles.

Although some of them soon ceased to trouble over this, yet the true and patriotic Jew could not repress the longing for his native land. He looked out over the plain, made rich in produce by the abundant

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canals, but monotonous and uninspiring, and his soul longed for the mountains of Israel. He walked beside the huge ramparts of Babylon and felt them to be prison walls. He gazed up at the lofty Temple of Bel with its gorgeous colours and exalted shrine, saw in it the symbol of the power that had devastated his home, and came to hate idolatry with a hatred that no prophet had been able to inspire. Putting ourselves in their places, we can readily understand why Ezekiel in two great chapters addresses his words to "the mountains of Israel," and speaks "to the mountains and to the hills, to the water-courses and to the valleys." We can appreciate, too, what made the great prophet, who saw deliverance coming, cry out, "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth." And we can sympathize with that bitter cry of the exile from home, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion."¹

IMPORTANCE OF THE EXILE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ezekiel's Ministry.—Among those carried off by Nebuchadnezzar after his first attack on Jerusalem was Ezekiel the prophet. This man began his work

¹ Ezekiel vi. and xxxvi.; Isaiah xlv. 1; Psalm cxxxvii.

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by endeavouring to correct the false hopes of a speedy return, held by many of the captives. This made him thoroughly disliked, but the utter destruction of Jerusalem ten years later proved the truth of his message. From that time he was looked up to by the exiles as a prophet sent of God to sustain them in their trial. He acted as a pastor to the Jews living near him, and his inspired visions kept them from losing heart and prepared the nation for the future that was yet to be theirs. We can picture him gathering them together in his house or in some quiet place in the fields, and telling them the visions that God had sent him; while they hung breathlessly upon his words, and the flames of a noble patriotism burned higher and yet higher in their hearts.

Origin of Synagogue.—Such gatherings soon became a regular feature in the life of the exiles, and produced permanent results. They naturally found it helpful to meet in this way on the Sabbath, and what was at first an informal assembly gradually developed into a regular service for worship and the reading of the law book. In this way there grew up the institution of the Synagogue, which ever since has been a powerful instrument for keeping the scattered Jews faithful to their race and religion.

Preparations for Return.—Nor was the Synagogue

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the only lasting outcome of this fellowship of the exiles. Their gatherings stimulated their love for the old home and fed their faith in the God of their fathers. Jerusalem became in their eyes the Holy City, and the restoration of the Temple the great desire of their hearts. Along with this there developed also an intense love for everything connected with their past history, and especially their religion; and in the hope that some day the Jewish nation and worship would be re-established in their ancient home, they began to collect every record they could find, bearing upon these subjects, and to store them up for future use. In this hope they were encouraged by the words of Jeremiah,¹ who had proclaimed a limit of seventy years to the exile, and by Ezekiel's visions of the new Israel that should rise out of the ashes of the old. Thus there spread through a large portion of the exiles an enthusiasm for the religion of Jehovah which the nation had never shown in its more prosperous days. Numbers gave their spare time and wealth to the task of keeping up the patriotic sentiment of the other exiles, and collecting every fragment from the past which had survived the hurricane of conquest. Preparation for the return became the one thing to live for, and the spirit of many of them cannot be better

¹ Chap. xxv. 12.

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expressed than in the words of the one hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm :

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not ;
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Work for the Bible.—As a result of all this zeal the Exile became, in relation to the Bible, the most important period of Hebrew history. It was supremely the time for the gathering together of records, and for fashioning them into connected accounts. The chronicles of kings, the doings and sayings of prophets, the traditions and laws of the priesthood, and the memories associated with pillars, ruins, wells, etc., were all lovingly set down in writing, or, if already in writing, carefully collected. Later on they were put together as continuous narratives, and copies were made, by hand of course, and circulated among those who were zealous for Israel and prosperous enough to afford them. The thorough collection and editing of the laws and other official records, as preserved from time immemorial in the families of the priests, was a very special part of this work ; and as Ezekiel, the most influential figure in the early years of the Exile, was himself a priest, it is thought that he had something to do

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with the early stages in the preparation of this priestly record. The 'Priestly Document,' as it is called, referred to among Biblical students as P, was afterward combined with the Primitive Document spoken of in Chapter III. The Book of Deuteronomy, which had already been enlarged by the addition of the story of the conquest of Palestine under Joshua, was also added to this account, and the whole carefully linked up so as to make one great composite history of the Hebrews from Creation to the settlement in Canaan. Other histories, including Judges, Samuel, and Kings, were similarly treated. The writings left by prophets or their disciples were sought out, and any fragmentary writings which seemed to belong to one or another were added for the sake of completeness. Some of these bits, however, were put in the wrong place, so that in several of the prophetic books we have passages, and occasionally long sections, which do not really come from the prophet whose name the book bears. Religious poems also were collected, whether hymns which had been sung at services, or private prayers. Mention should likewise be made of the proverbs. Indeed, such was the feeling of some of these exiles that they treasured, more than precious jewels, anything whatever which had a connexion with their past national existence. Con-

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science had been deeply stirred by disaster, and they believed that by these labours they were both showing a true penitence for past neglect, and preparing the way to a glorious future for their beloved Israel.

THE RETURN, 537 B.C.

The Second Isaiah.—Fifty years of exile had rolled slowly and sadly by, when a new voice spoke to Israel, and the breath of revived hope stirred the branches of the nation. In that half century most of those who came out from Jerusalem had passed away, and a new generation had taken their place. Ezekiel had ceased to prophesy twenty years before. Nebuchadnezzar, their conqueror, had died in 562, and had been followed by two descendants and a usurper, whose son, Belshazzar, became for all practical purposes the ruler in Babylon. Then a new conqueror arose, Cyrus, who overthrew the Medes, secured the throne of Persia, by a series of successful campaigns made himself master of western Asia, and finally took Babylon itself, putting Belshazzar to death. The marvellous career of this great soldier was closely watched by one of the exiled Jews, who saw in him the instrument of Jehovah for the deliverance of Israel. This exile,

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the new voice already referred to and one of the greatest prophets that ever spoke to God's people, uttered his prophecies in the years between the appearance of Cyrus as the conqueror of the Medes and his overthrow of the Babylonians. The prophet must have been a great man; probably he held an official position in Babylon, and this may have been the reason why his name was not put to his prophecies, so that to this day we do not know who he was. We have his messages, however, in the latter part of Isaiah, commencing at chapter forty, for which reason he is conveniently called the Second Isaiah. He saw that God would use Cyrus to give freedom to his people. Every victory for Cyrus, therefore, meant the breaking of another of the cords that tied the exiles to their bondage, and brought nearer the doom of their captors. So the prophet sent the message of a near and sure deliverance thrilling throughout the exile band, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." He heard a voice calling them to cross the desert to their native country and promising assistance, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low." The embers of hope he fanned into a mighty flame with his challenging call, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

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The Return.—These prophecies received a speedy fulfilment. Cyrus entered Babylon in October, 538 B.C., and one of his first acts was to issue an edict giving permission to the Jews to return to Palestine, allowing them to carry back the sacred vessels belonging to the Temple, and commanding them to rebuild the ruined sanctuary at Jerusalem. Under this edict a multitude, stated by Ezra to number over forty thousand, set out the next year and reached Jerusalem safely under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, and Joshua a priest. For a few months they were busy restoring the ruined homes, but in the autumn they assembled, set up the great altar of burnt offering on its ancient site, and restored the sacrifices.

Rebuilding of the Temple. Haggai and Zechariah.—The next year they laid the foundation stone for a new temple, but progress was prevented by the opposition of the Samaritans, a neighbouring people of mixed descent. The returned exiles regarded them as unfit to assist in the work on the temple, because they were not of true Jewish birth; and, not being allowed to help, they decided to hinder. This opposition and the difficulties of making a new start in life, together with a series of bad harvests, brought the work to a standstill. It was not until sixteen years had passed that the work

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of rebuilding the Temple was again taken in hand. At that time there had been a succession of bad seasons, and the colonists, surrounded by hostile tribes, were in a very unenviable position. But God raised up two more prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—whose earnest efforts roused the people to their task. They realized the importance of the Temple to a nation that had ceased to possess any political power or freedom. It was the outward sign of their faith, and their faith was the one bond holding them together. So Haggai urged that the poor crops were the penalty for their neglect of the sanctuary, and Zechariah stirred them with bright promises of blessing to come. Their combined endeavours had the desired effect. Appeal for permission was made to the Persian governor of the province, and by him to the reigning king, who readily consented when the original edict of Cyrus was found. The king also ordered the officials of the district to assist. Thus in 520 B.C. the work was recommenced, and completed by 516. Worship was restored. The priesthood was reorganized. The Temple on Mount Sion became once more the religious centre of the Jews, and the goal to which with longing hearts, from all points of the compass, pilgrims pressed to the great festivals.¹

¹ See the early chapters of Ezra and Haggai, and Zechariah i.-viii.

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Dark Days of Malachi.—Despite this Temple restoration, however, things went badly with the ‘children of the captivity,’ as the returned exiles were called. We know nothing with certainty of events in Jerusalem during the next sixty years, but the hints we can glean suggest that they were years of religious indifference, of comparative poverty, and of grave social injustice. The hatred with which the Jews were regarded by other nations, and the dangers to which they might be exposed under a careless ruler, are reflected in the book of Esther. The low condition of the people of Jerusalem itself is seen in the pages of the prophet Malachi, who lived there during this period. He complains of the popular neglect of the sanctuary, and the failure to pay their tithes for the maintenance of priest and sacrifice. He rebukes their lack of faith and their contamination by the heathen. He denounces also the priests for their slovenly conduct of the Temple services, and for offering sacrifices which were a disgrace to the altar. The whole picture is one to justify fully the anxiety for the Holy City felt by the faithful Jews still living in Babylonia, and the efforts which they then began to make for its improvement.

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Ezra's Mission.—First among these efforts was the mission of Ezra, who came to Jerusalem with a strong party in 458 B.C. He was well read in all the books which the exiles had got together, and especially in that great historical and legal account of the past, which had been woven out of many records as already described. With the later stages of this work Ezra probably had much to do: for the literary work of the Exile was not completed in the half century before the return, but was continued by those who remained in Babylonia right down to the time of Ezra and even later; and when Ezra set out for Jerusalem it was with the definite object of getting the Temple services reformed, so as to make them agree with the customs and laws, which the exiles had unearthed, and which were set out in this 'Book of the Law.' When he got to Jerusalem, however, he found things so bad that, before he could give the book to the people, he had to get some very serious evils redressed. Chief among these was the habit of marrying foreigners, by which means the small community of Jews was being rapidly lost among the heathen. Even priests and leading citizens were showing a bad example in this respect. The result was that Ezra, instead of leading the people

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in an enthusiastic attempt to make the Temple more worthy of Jehovah, was compelled to fight this evil in high and low. He secured a large measure of support and was able to put a brake on the dangerous habit, but it disturbed so many that he lost his influence, and was unable to carry out his plan.¹

Nehemiah and the Wall.—Thirteen years later the second attempt was made by the exiles to improve matters at Jerusalem. This time Nehemiah was the leader, who came with a bodyguard of Persian soldiers, and aimed at restoring the city's ruined walls. In those days it was felt to be a disgrace for a great city to be without walls, and Jerusalem was looked down upon because hers had been destroyed. It was not easy, however, to build them, because her jealous neighbours resented any attempt to strengthen her fortifications, and were likely to attack the city whenever operations were begun. Nehemiah, however, succeeded in kindling the enthusiasm of the people so well, and led them in the work with such ability and self-sacrifice, that in the astonishingly brief space of fifty-two days the walls were built and the gates set up.²

'The Law' published.—In the rejoicings produced

¹ There may have been other difficulties, such as opposition from the satrap of the province.

² For the interesting story of these operations and the opposition overcome see Neh. ii.-vi.

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by the success of this effort Ezra saw his opportunity. He may have been living in the city all the thirteen years, waiting for some turn of events to provide the chance of publishing the book, and now at last it had come. Nehemiah heartily approved of his plans, and the great celebrations for the rebuilding of the walls were used for introducing the people to the Book of the Law. Standing on a wooden pulpit, Ezra read from the book from morning until mid-day.¹ On the next day this was repeated, and they came in the reading to the institution of the Feast of Tabernacles, which had not been kept for ages. As the time of the year was just right, they at once arranged to keep the feast, and every day of the feast the reading and explaining of the Book of the Law was continued. Two days after the feast the covenant between Jehovah and Israel was solemnly ratified, with fasting and confession of sin, on the terms laid down in the Law. Thus the Book of the Law was formally made known to, and adopted by, the Jewish nation. It comprised the first five books of the Bible, which together we call the Pentateuch, built up by unknown hands out of the Jehovist, Elohist, Deuteronomic, and Priestly narratives, themselves based on ancient memorials and laws reaching back to Moses and Abraham. It reached its final

¹ See Neh. viii.

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form among the exiles who remained in Babylonia, and was published at Jerusalem, as we have seen, by Ezra and Nehemiah in the year 444 B.C. From that time it became the acknowledged standard of Jewish law and religion, and is recognized as such in all their later writings and doings. Henceforth for them there was no question as to what the word of God was. Discussion in the future was all to centre, not on the substance, but on the meaning of the word.

The Jewish Canon.—That ‘the Law’ was accepted as Scripture before the other books, we see from the form of the Jewish Bible. The Old Testament is divided up into three parts, just as we divide the whole Bible into two: the Old and New Testaments. The first part of the Old Testament the Jews call ‘the Law,’ the second is ‘the Prophets,’ and the third ‘the Writings.’ The Law contains only the five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, with which we have been dealing. The Prophets contains two groups: the Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and the Latter Prophets—the three great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets—the twelve from Hosea to Malachi making one book. The third part, ‘the Writings,’ is in three groups: (a) the Poetical Books—Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; (b) the Five Rolls—Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesi-

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astes, and Esther; (c) the remaining books—Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The list of books recognized as belonging to the Bible is called 'the Canon,' and these three parts of the Jewish Bible are the marks of three stages in the growth of the Canon of the Old Testament. The first Canon was determined when it was publicly ratified in the days of Nehemiah. The Canon of the prophets was not completed for another two hundred years, although most of the books belonging to it were in existence in Ezra's time, and some, like Joshua and Jeremiah, were well known. But for a while the Pentateuch overshadowed everything else, and these other books were not considered worthy to be placed beside the Book of the Law.

The Samaritan Split.—Ezra and Nehemiah were not content merely to read the book. They set to work to bring the life of the people into conformity with its teaching. Nehemiah used the power he held under the Persian monarch to enforce the law against marrying foreigners, and was supported by a majority of the population; but there were many who thought this was going too far. Among these were some of the leading Jews, several of whom left the city, moved into Samaria, and built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. This, following the similar quarrel due to the opponents of Ezra, was the origin of the

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deep enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. From our point of view, however, there is a special interest in their Bible. For the Samaritans have a Bible, but it includes only the five books of the Law, and is called the Samaritan Pentateuch. And the fact that it has none of the prophets of the Second Canon shows that when the split occurred the Hebrew Bible contained only Ezra's Book of the Law.

"A Tale of Two Cities."—We began this chapter with a picture of Babylon: we close it with the little community in Jerusalem. What a contrast lies in their subsequent fates! The majesty and might of Babylon have vanished, and for ages her ruins have been lost in the desert. There is not a people to-day that looks back to her with pride: her children have perished with her. But the Holy City, which then lay in ruins, despite all the sieges, burnings, and massacres she has known, persists; and in all the ends of the earth devout hearts think of her with thrills of deep emotion, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Perished is the conqueror, but the captive lives. And she lives mainly because, in the dark days of her exile, she did not yield to despair, but used the opportunity to build up the Book of the Law, and to gather together that which is the most renewing element in any nation, the noblest visions of her noblest sons, their visions of God.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMPLETION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. GLIMPSES OF JEWISH HISTORY FROM EZRA TO CHRIST
The Jewish Colony. The Persian and Greek Empires
The New Israel and Language. The Dispersion
The Maccabees. Palestine a Roman Province
2. INFLUENCES WHICH FORMED THE SECOND CANON
Veneration for the Past—Histories, Great Prophets
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BY the clever art of the photographer a film can be produced picturing a man recalling his past life. The figure of the man remains throughout, and beside him a succession of incidents from his career is thrown upon the screen, each fading out as it is concluded, like the visions of a dream. With some such cunning fancy we must

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now try to realize the position of the little Jewish colony, in and around Jerusalem, throughout the movements of the great empires which swept over it during the next four hundred years. Were it possible in this way to revive clearly all the changes of that period, we should understand the influences which moulded the rest of the Old Testament, and led to its completion. For that, however, we should need more pictures than our book would hold. But perhaps even a few scenes will give life to the story, and help us in our endeavour to appreciate the Bible.

The Jewish Colony.—The first picture on our screen shows us their land at the beginning of the period. It is not the whole of the country of David and Solomon; nor even the smaller kingdom of Judah, which resulted from the division in the days of Rehoboam; it is simply Jerusalem and the country surrounding it within a radius of ten or fifteen miles. Over that area we see the scattered homes, where the returned exiles have established themselves; and in the land beyond we note the envious faces of the tribes which had striven to prevent the restoration of the capital. Immediately to the north the Samaritans are planted, nearer in race but still more bitterly opposed, because of the recent quarrel. We scan the hills and valleys, from east to west and

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from north to south. From any point a farmer could bring his produce to the Jerusalem market in a single day's journey. It is not a country : it is scarcely a county ; and the inhabitants are so few that we must think of them as a colony rather than a nation.

The Colony a Church.—The hills fade from our view and we find ourselves in the council chamber of the Temple. In the seat of authority is the High Priest. He is the real governor of the colony. When Nehemiah reorganized the community on the basis of the Book of the Law, he made that book their system of government, with the result that the Temple became their law courts, the priests their police and judges, and the High Priest their king. Jerusalem is not so much a colony as a church. The Persian emperor may send an officer to collect taxes and keep order, but the real ruler of Jerusalem henceforth is the High Priest.

The Persian Empire.—The Temple on Mount Zion recedes to the far horizon, and a gorgeous palace rises into view. It is the home of the Persian emperors. Persian warriors guard its gates. Persian officers, richly apparelled, come to hold audience with the monarch. Couriers pass out and in : some on camels, dusty with desert sand, and others on the finest horses of Arabia. Outside the city we see armies muster and march away : now to

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Syria, now to Egypt, and anon to India: sometimes to victory and spoils and glory, and sometimes to their doom. Around that palace gathers the history of the world for the next hundred years. When a question is raised concerning Jerusalem, search must be made in the archives, for the emperor thinks little, and remembers less, of the history of so small a portion of his world-wide empire.

The Greek Empires.—Again the scene changes. We are in the Plain of Sharon, watching a mighty army, with the steady tramp of discipline and the confident bearing of success, march southward along the great coast route toward Arabia and Egypt. Who are they? Their faces are tanned with exposure, but they are not dark skinned like the Persians. They are white men. And who is that officer rushing past in his chariot, receiving from every company the cheers which show him to be the idol of his men? It is Alexander the Great; and this is the army with which, between 334 and 323 B.C., he put an end to the Persian dominion, and conquered the world. For the Jews this meant a change of masters. On the death of Alexander his empire was divided, and for most of the next 120 years, till 203, Palestine was under the Greek rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt. Then it was annexed by the Syrian empire, whose rulers are called the

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Seleucidæ, and remained in their power for sixty years, until it was made independent in 142 by the Maccabeans.

A New Israel and Language.—Now we are back in Jerusalem. Two centuries have rolled by since Ezra's work was done. We are in the third century B.C. The High Priest has become the pope of Judaism. The little colony has multiplied, and its people, now scattered all over their ancient territory, have made it once more a Hebrew land. Wherever they have settled they still look to Jerusalem as the centre of their religion, contribute to the upkeep of the Temple, and visit it at least once a year. It is this centralized religion and increased patriotism which have made them able to keep their faith among the heathen, win many of the Gentiles to their ways, and become again the leading race in the country. But while they have been altering Palestine into a Hebrew land, they themselves have been altered. Their language has changed. It remains similar to the Hebrew of old, and yet it is not quite the same. They can still read and understand their Scriptures; but their speech has been so influenced by much intercourse with the other inhabitants that it has gradually been transformed into what we call Aramaic, and Hebrew has become a dead language.

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The Dispersion.—But what is this? The sea spreads out before us wide and restless, its wavelets lapping against the quay walls of a great and fair city. The Jewish face meets us here also at almost every turn. Frequently we find buildings inscribed with Hebrew characters, which turn out to be synagogues, and could we search the rooms of some of those stately mansions we should find copies of the Scriptures, no longer written in Hebrew but translated into Greek, the language which had become the commercial language of the world. This is a picture of Alexandria, and the people are Jews of the Dispersion, representatives of countless numbers who have found their way into many lands, but who still look to the city on the hill as the home of their race and the earthly temple of their God.

The Maccabees.—Once more Mount Zion rises before our eyes; but terror is printed on the faces of her sons, and there is bloodshed within her walls. A brutal Greek king, Antiochus Epiphanes, has set himself to stamp out her religion. A pig has been offered on the Temple altar. Throughout the land the Scriptures are being seized, and the faithful persecuted to death. The cruel tyranny is, however, broken by the Maccabean revolt (167-162),¹ which

¹ The Maccabean Revolt was started at Modein, some twenty miles from Jerusalem, by an aged priest named Mattathias, who refused to offer sacrifice according to pagan custom when com-

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for heroism and genius is not surpassed in history. The grim weight of numbers is all against the Jews, but they inflict defeat after defeat upon their oppressors, win freedom for their religion, and a measure of independence for their nation, which now once more, if only for a limited period (142-63), becomes a self-governed state.

Palestine a Roman Province.—One other picture we must throw upon our screen. Again it is an army, marching this time upon Jerusalem itself. In contrast with any we have hitherto met, however, this army is so perfectly organized and disciplined that it acts like a machine. Its legions move or stand

mandated to do so by the Greek officer. A weaker Jew coming forward to do it, Mattathias rushed forward, slew both the Jew and the officer, and tore down the altar. Then he fled to the hills, called on all the faithful to join him, and soon gathered a desperate band of heroes ready to die for their religion, who went about destroying heathen altars and enforcing Jewish customs. Next year, in 166, Mattathias died, and the leadership fell to his son Judas, the greatest warrior that Israel ever produced. He trained and organized his men so well that he was able to defeat the Syrian army at Bethoron (166), at Emmaus, and at Bethzur (165). In December of that year he reconsecrated the Temple at Jerusalem, an event celebrated in the Feast of the Dedication. In 162 the Syrians sent a vast army which defeated Judas at Bethzur and laid siege to the Temple, but the army was recalled and a treaty made securing religious liberty to the Jews. Judas continued to lead the Jews in a struggle for full independence, and defeated another Syrian army at Adasar in 161, but was himself defeated and killed later in the year by an overwhelming force at Elasa. Jonathan and Simon, brothers of Judas, followed him in the leadership, and under Simon independence was secured in 142 B.C.

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as if swayed by a single will. Its standard bearers carry no flags, but each holds a staff on which is mounted a metal casting of an eagle. This eagle is the symbol of the Roman Republic. The iron heel has come at last. The Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek empires have rolled over the hills of Palestine; and now, in 63 B.C., the might of the Roman sweeps into Jerusalem. The short-lived independence of the Jews is at an end. Palestine is in the hands of Pompey. Roman sentinels guard the gates of the Holy City. Before the High Priest's main decisions can be carried out, they must be approved by a Roman governor. The land of the Rabbis is a province of the Roman Empire.

INFLUENCES WHICH FORMED THE SECOND CANON

From these glimpses of the history of the four hundred years between Nehemiah and New Testament times, we turn to consider the manner in which, under the influence of these varying conditions, the Old Testament was completed. At the commencement of the period we have a struggling little community in Jerusalem, with a Bible consisting only of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. At the end of it we have the

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great Jewish church, still centred in Jerusalem, but represented, as we saw at Alexandria, by synagogues all over the ancient world, and with a Bible composed no longer of five books, but of thirty-nine, the whole of our present Old Testament. As already pointed out, most of the additional thirty-four books were well known in Ezra's day : but the steps by which they came to be placed beside the books of Moses, and to be joined by others, we must now try to trace. We shall find the explanation in the activities and sufferings of the little community at Jerusalem, tossed and tempest driven in the storms through which the old empires grew and decayed. Amid all the changes of that history, God was working for the good of the people of those times, and for those who should come after them, whose lives have been enriched by the greatest treasure the ancient world has bequeathed to us, the Old Testament of the Jews.

Veneration for the Past.—First, then, we must recognize the influence of that great veneration for the past which sprang up in the Exile and worked continuously among the 'children of the captivity' in the restored capital. No greatness remained to them in their present state. They were despised and oppressed. But the ground they trod was sacred to the memory of a great past. When they drew

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nigh to the city and saw its walls, they thrilled with the pride of ancestry. When they gathered in the Temple they recalled the richer building of Solomon. As they listened to the reading of the Commandments they stood again amid the awe and splendour of Sinai. Forced by their present poverty to find inspiration in the past, everything connected with the times when they were a free nation under their own kings became exceedingly precious. Now among these things were a number of writings, which told the history of those days, and told it, not as ordinary school-books tell history, but as a prophet tells it, showing how the sins of their fathers had led them into disaster. Was it to be wondered at that they began to count these books as sacred, to read from them in the synagogues, and gradually to give them a place alongside the Book of the Law? It was thus that the books of Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, very early in this period, acquired that sanctity and authority which led to their inclusion among the Holy Scriptures.

The Great Prophets.—And if this happened with books of history, it was bound to happen with books of prophecy: for therein men spoke directly in the name of Jehovah. Such books do not wait to have their inspiration discovered: they claim it. The men of his time might ridicule Isaiah; they might

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throw Jeremiah into a dungeon; but the 'children of the captivity' judged the prophets in the light of all the sufferings that befell an impenitent nation, and knew that they had been sent by God. So the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were also placed with the Law, and exercised such an influence that this second group, growing up around the Law, began to be called 'the Prophets,' although including several which were really histories. Thus veneration for the past secured the recognition of quite a number of books, and led to their being regularly read in the synagogue services; a step which naturally culminated in their reception into the Canon.

Centralized Worship. The Psalms.—The next great influence to be noticed is that of the centralized worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. The fact that there, and there alone, as laid down in the Book of the Law, could the sacrifices be offered, made everything connected with the Temple services sacred. The Jew did not share our knowledge that God can be worshipped truly at any place and time. It was Jesus who taught us that. The Jew could meet in the Synagogue and pray; but he regarded such worship as a makeshift, a poor substitute for the real thing, merely a means of educating his children and reminding himself, lest he forget his privileges and lose touch with the hope of Israel.

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For true worship he must go to Jerusalem. Thus the practice of going up to the feasts grew, and became a regular feature of the people's life. Any book that was regularly employed at the Temple services became, through that simple fact, one of their sacred books; and thus the final stamp of authority was impressed upon books which had become precious enough to gain a place in those great services. One book especially owes its place in the Old Testament to its use in the Temple. Written by many hands, in times far separated, sometimes out of triumphant faith and sometimes well nigh in despair, it gathers up nearly every joy and sorrow that can fall to human lot, and spreads them all out before the throne of God. That collection of writings is the Book of Psalms, the hymn-book of the Second Temple, and the finest flower of Jewish worship. It did not readily attain a position in the Canon: it was so different from the other books. Slow recognition, however, was an advantage, for it was able to go on growing throughout most of the four hundred years. But by the end of that time the Book of Psalms had gained a place as sure as any, and certainly as well deserved.

Jewish Separateness.—The third point to be considered is the narrowing influence of the isolation the Jews were maintaining, in keeping themselves

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so separate from other races. This policy of Nehemiah and Ezra certainly kept the Jews together, and saved them from losing their identity as a nation. It also preserved their religion, and the great revelations of their prophets. But on the Jews themselves it had some sad results. Gradually it created that spiritual pride, bigotry, and contempt for other races, which so disfigured their later religious life. They picked out all the promises of Divine aid, and built upon them a hope of national greatness, in which they should be the masters of the world. They took the covenant with Abraham to mean that nobody but a Jew was precious in God's sight. In many this grew to such an extent that scorn of the foreigner became the strongest part of their religion. But in every dark age of Israel's history there was some prophet to protest against the evil of the day, and now also the more broad-minded speedily saw that this hatred of other races was contrary to the earlier teaching about God, and especially to His promise that through Abraham 'all the nations of the earth' should be blessed. Hence, from this quarter, there came one of the most powerful statements ever written of God's love for all mankind; a book which showed in striking fashion that heathen nations can repent and obey God, that God delights to have mercy upon

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them, and that Israel's duty is not to despise but to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

The Book of Jonah.—This protest was the book of Jonah. It is a small book, containing altogether only forty-eight verses, but written in the story fashion which, of all forms of teaching, is the best for penetrating ignorance and prejudice. In this manner it teaches three great lessons: (1) that God seeks the salvation of every race, looks in deepest pity on the masses crowded in great cities, and delights to pardon when they repent; (2) that men of heathen races pray to God and are heard by Him, that they are capable of great kindness and self-sacrifice, and often more ready to listen to God's messengers than are those who call themselves His people; and (3) that the Jew had been false to his duty, because, whereas God had sent him to be a missionary to other nations, he had tried to keep the knowledge of God to himself, and had sought the destruction of those he ought to have saved.

Symbolic Narrative.—Such teaching was a flat contradiction of what had become the popular religion of Jerusalem in the fourth century B.C. Doubtless those who believed these truths tried to teach them, but were met with a scorn which would have killed their endeavours and left no trace, but for this book. So they wrote this story, putting the

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truths in the form of a parable or symbolic narrative, and choosing as the hero of the tale Jonah, a prophet whose name was well known from 2 Kings xiv. 25, but of whose life they were in ignorance. Such symbolic stories were by no means new. Jeremiah had made use of the method,¹ so had Ezekiel,² and there are many other instances. In the New Testament our Lord relies almost entirely on parable for conveying His great messages. And outside the Bible we have in Bunyan a prince among those who convey truth in this simple and memorable manner. The book itself makes no claim to have been written by Jonah: indeed it implies the opposite; for it speaks of Nineveh as a city of the past,³ whereas in Jonah's time it was the flourishing capital of the world; and it gives the wrong title to its ruler,⁴ who was the emperor of the great Assyrian dominion, and not to be called the king of Nineveh any more than George V is to be called the king of London. Jonah lived in the days of Jeroboam II, 782-741 B.C., and this story, which makes use of him for its hero, was written hundreds of years later in the post-exilic period.

Effect of Jonah.—The parable was read and spoken of by Jews everywhere. Many who did not like its

¹ Jer. xxv. 15 ff.

² Ezek. iv. 5 ff. and elsewhere.

³ Chap. iii. 3.

⁴ Chap. iii. 6.

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teaching enjoyed the story. Perhaps its meaning was not always seen. But the story took fast hold, and gradually its truths got home into many hearts. They saw that Jonah represented their unfaithful nation. They saw in the fish a picture of the Exile that had swallowed their national life, but from which they had been able to return. They recognized in the prayers of the heathen sailors and their efforts to avoid drowning Jonah the spirit that is always acceptable to God. The quick and thorough repentance of the Ninevites made them feel afresh the hardness and impenitence of their own countrymen, who had received so many prophets and rejected them. Above all, in God's rebuke to Jonah for his cruel temper, which desired that the Ninevites should not repent but be destroyed, they were shown the evil of the spiritual pride so rampant in their own days. The great parable did not save Israel from her prejudices, but it helped to create an inner Israel of men who had risen above the national pride and caught the wider spirit of the prophets. It remains, too, for all time, as the great call to missionary activity among the nations that sit in darkness, and the masses that crowd the courts and alleys of our great cities. For we are all in danger of thinking more of the fruit-tree in our own little garden than of the great multitudes of men and

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women around us, and so of deserving God's rebuke to Jonah, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd . . . which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Authority of the Law.—This book of Jonah was one of the last to be included in *The Book of the Twelve*,¹ and we are now in a position to consider what it was which led to the completion of the second Canon, the great group of Old Testament books known as 'the Prophets.' The chief cause was a deepened sense of the value of prophecy. We saw in our last chapter how the Book of the Law was published, and made the standard of Jewish life by Nehemiah and Ezra. At once it gained great authority: but by constant use as the umpire in every dispute, and the guide in every important action, that authority grew, until it came to be looked upon as the one supreme statement of God's will. Any utterance that did not base itself on the Law was despised and rejected. Thus the nation, when seeking guidance, learned to turn, not to the prophet, but to the interpreter of the Law, as the man who spoke for God. The priest gained power,

¹ See next page—"The Minor Prophets."

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the scribe¹ gained even more power, and the living prophet was ignored. When a man burns with a message, as Jeremiah did, he must speak. But when that man himself and everybody around him looks to a book for everything, he is content to urge a closer attention to this or that which is already written. Thus the voice of the prophet ceased to be heard in Israel, and after a while men came to think that prophecy was dead.

The Minor Prophets.—But the prophets had done too much for Israel to be forgotten; and as men realized that a long time had passed since a prophet had spoken among them, they began to value the work of the prophets more highly and to give attention to their writings. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had long held a place in the esteem of the people second only to ‘the Law.’ The historical books, full of the same prophetic spirit and telling the loved story of the days of the kingdom, were

¹ The scribes were the men who made copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, which had to be done by hand, and who became the recognized authorities on ‘the Law.’ At first they were priests, like Ezra, but later many were laymen. The importance of ‘the Law’ brought them to the front; the decay of Hebrew as a spoken language made trained interpreters necessary, and the multiplication of synagogues, where the Scriptures were regularly read and expounded, supplied them with a splendid opportunity. In the days of Greek influence, when many of the priests adopted pagan religion, the scribes remained the great teachers of the national faith, and received the support of the people, who honoured them with such titles as ‘Rabbi.’

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associated with them. Other prophets, whose writings were of smaller extent, like those of Amos, Hosea, and Micah, were also prized; and these were now gathered up into one book, containing all the smaller prophetic works, to which later prophecies were gradually added until it contained no less than twelve little works of prophecy. This Book of the Twelve, as they called it, corresponded to our twelve Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The word 'minor' refers to the shortness of these books, not to their importance; and is very misleading, because at least two of them, Amos and Hosea, are among the very greatest of Hebrew prophets: and Jonah, despite its brevity, rises to as great heights as any of them, and comes as near to Christ in its teaching. However, what we have to realize is that it was the silencing of prophecy by the authority of the Law which made the nation conscious of the value of prophecy, and led to the second stage in the growth of the Old Testament, the addition of the Prophets to the Law, so that henceforth their Bible was known as 'the Law and the Prophets.'

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INFLUENCES WHICH COMPLETED THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

Resistance to Persecution: Esther, Daniel.—We have spoken of the silencing of the prophet, but prophecy can never be really silenced. The weight of a great authority, like the Law promulgated under Ezra and Nehemiah, may prevent men from speaking in the style of the prophets who lived before those books were recognized; but when men are burning with a message from God, they will find some ways of telling out the truth that is in them. And men's hearts did begin to burn again in Israel in the dark days, of which we had a glimpse among our pictures, when many were dying for the faith, so much so that we must count resistance to persecution among the influences which helped to complete the Old Testament. Those were days of great suffering for the faithful Jews; and many, rather than bear the losses and pains of persecution, threw over their religion and joined the pagan multitude. The sight of these deserting the faith, and forsaking the true God to worship corrupting idols, stirred the prophetic spirit to renewed activity. Drawing from the resources of the past, prophetic souls tried to inspire men to faithfulness and endurance by circulating accounts of the heroic deeds of their fathers.

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It was thus that the story of Esther appeared, a narrative well calculated to strengthen the weak and inspire renewed hope. And it was thus that Daniel, the greatest effort of the kind, was written; appealing in the same way to heroism through the story of the brave steadfastness of Daniel and his friends; and developing a new line of thought, now called apocalyptic,¹ which aimed at encouraging the Jews by showing how, through the rise and fall of empires, God is working toward the establishment of His own abiding Kingdom. Other similar stories were written, which never found a place in the Hebrew Old Testament, though many of them found their way into the Septuagint, as the Greek translation of the Old Testament was called, where the early Christians became familiar with them and through which they are associated with the Old Testament under the name of the Apocrypha. These brave appeals were not made in vain. They produced the daring which enabled hundreds to die rather than give up their faith, created that splendid enthusiasm and courage which through the Maccabean Revolt broke the power of Greek tyranny, and gave to Israel a new lease of national life and liberty.

¹ From Apocalypse=Revelation, the title of the last book in the New Testament, which is a writing of this type.

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The Problem of Suffering : Ecclesiastes, Job.—There were, however, other fruits on this bitter tree of persecution, and before we close our survey we must consider the influence of the problem of suffering, as it was forced upon thoughtful Israelites by their national experiences. Before the fires of revolt had been kindled, some of these men felt deeply the losses and sorrows which had swept over them, not only as a nation, but also individually. The emptiness of human triumph, and the depth of human tragedy, had made some among them question whether God really did rule in human life at all. And among the men who thus tried to examine God's ways were two who wrote their thoughts in books which have been included in the Bible. One of them is Ecclesiastes, written by a man who saw how fleeting are our joys and was oppressed with the vanity of all earthly pleasures and possessions. Yet he clung to God, found the way of wisdom in obedience to His will, and showed us how a sad and depressed soul may still find a place among those who love and worship. But the greatest book dealing with human sorrow is Job, a marvellous poem, in which, using the case of Job as a starting point, some unnamed but wonderful poet has tried to find the meaning of life's pain and disappointments. The book contains passages of exquisite beauty and pro-

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found insight, some of which are among the finest jewels in the treasury of Scripture. It proclaims no cure for the ills of life, but it teaches humility and thought for others, and that deep trust in the will and wisdom of God, armed with which we can endure hardship, and rise above it stronger and purer for our trials.

Sacred Names and Language: Proverbs, Ruth, etc.—For our last consideration we return to the first. That veneration for the past which sprang up in the Exile, and afterward gave the historic books from Joshua to Kings their place in the Second Canon, continued to operate throughout this period. It gave increasing value to all their sacred possessions, and strengthened still further the hold of the Temple, its sacrifices and services, and the Law and the Prophets on the affections of the people. The Hebrew language itself had now come to be reckoned among those precious things of former days: for, as we saw in our opening pictures, the use of Hebrew gradually gave place to Aramaic for popular intercourse, and to Greek for purposes of study and commerce. The inclusion of the remaining books of the Old Testament—Ruth, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Chronicles—can all be understood from this point of view. Chronicles includes Ezra and Nehemiah, which at

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first were all parts of one volume. Each of these books has its own value, without which no notice would have been taken of it; but each is also associated with some great figure of the past, which fact gave it a strong hold upon this love of bygone days. Ruth is precious because it relates to the ancestry of David. The Song of Songs and Proverbs were both connected with the name of Solomon, whose proverbial wisdom had made him draw around him, like a magnet, all the wise sayings of the nation. Lamentations was looked upon as the poetical expression of Jeremiah's grief for fallen Jerusalem. Chronicles tells again, with many variations, and with more attention to details connected with the Temple services, the story of the kings; and brings it down, in Ezra and Nehemiah, to the restoration of the Temple and the publication of the Law. These books then, differing greatly in subject and style, are alike in that they speak of the past, and it was chiefly this fact that won for them their place: for the past contained all that gave the people their sense of national greatness, and out of it flowed that mighty hope for the future which had grown up around the promise of the Messiah. On the other hand the mere fact that others were written in Greek, and therefore void of all claim to antiquity, was sufficient to keep out of the Canon some great and

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beautiful books, produced in this period, such as the apocryphal book of Wisdom. Thus we arrive at the third stage, the Canon of 'The Writings,' that miscellaneous group of prophecy and history, poetry and proverb, tragedy and love song, despairing doubt and triumphant faith, which is the completion of the Jewish Old Testament, and is alluded to in the New, under the title of its most important book, where reference is made to "the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms."¹

THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A WHOLE

A Prophetic Nation.—In all these chapters dealing with the Old Testament, and in this last chapter especially, there stands out in unmistakable manner the way in which God worked through the life of a nation to give us our Bible. At first we are inclined to think that the Bible was made by a few men; but gradually, as the whole story grows before us, we see how very little individual men had to do with it. Behind the early movements of the Hebrews, in which it all began, was a historic situation, which the leader did not create, and which he could only handle as God enabled him. In a later age the prophets did a wonderful work: but

¹ Luke xxiv. 44.

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each of these learned from those who went before, from the Spirit of God within, and, not least, from the circumstances of his day. Then came the writers, some themselves prophets, others telling history as they saw it in the light of their growing faith, while others again are expressing their thoughts in parable and psalm. Hundreds of years are rolling on as this proceeds. Kings come and go. Disaster follows disaster. Things hidden in one age become clear in another. The fires of human joy and sorrow consume the stubble and discover the gold. Writings are lost and discovered, sifted and combined, and finally chosen or rejected according to the needs of a people struggling for existence. Gradually from this seething cataract of troubled life there emerges the Bible. We cannot think of such a book as the work of a few men. It is something far greater. It is the record of God's revelation of Himself to a nation in and through the long ages of its history. The Old Testament is not only the message of so many prophets: it is the message of a prophetic people, blind and blundering often enough, but in the tragedy of their blindness, no less than in the glory of their splendid vision, God's prophet to the nations.

Three Chief Messages.—Lastly we must try to realize where the Old Testament leaves us. It said much: but it left much to be said. Before the

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Exile its message may be summed up as the call *to know God*. Through all these ages Israel's peril was a degraded idea of Jehovah; and the labour of the prophets was to show that Jehovah was a God of righteousness, demanding justice and truth before all ceremony and sacrifice. Then came the national collapse and the Exile, when men's hearts failed and all seemed lost. In such a time the need is for faith, and the message of the prophets of the Exile is the call *to trust God*. Following this we have the return and publication of the Law, and the main emphasis after the Exile is on the call *to obey God*: to obey the revelation already given, by strict observance of the written word, by loyal support of the sanctuary, by sending abroad the light of God's will, and in the hour of persecution by fidelity even unto death.

The Old Testament Incomplete.—Now these three—knowledge, trust, and obedience—are great things; and if they had been complete there might have been little need for a New Testament. But when we go into details we find them lacking at many points. The prophets give us a true knowledge of God, but not the whole of the truth. They taught His righteousness, some of them taught His love; but they did not make men see that love is the highest thing in God or man. At its very best the

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Old Testament brings us only to a loving righteousness, whereas Christ brings us to a righteous love. He makes love central and supreme. Again, the trust of the Old Testament is not the trust of the child in the loving Father; it is rather the hope that some day the tide will turn, and the oppressed people become wealthy conquerors. It is the hope of a national prosperity, that shall mean riches for every home: not the hope that every man shall be so purified that the whole nation shall be made happy. Even into the books themselves there creeps a sense of this incompleteness. They speak in many places of One who shall come after to fill up the teaching, a promise which gave birth to the hope of the Messiah, and united with their dreams of national greatness to make them look for a conquering king. But the prophets had spoken of a new covenant in the hearts of the people, of a prophet like unto Moses who taught them the path of duty, and of a suffering servant of Jehovah who by his agony should secure their peace. All alike, however, pointed forward to some greater One, and the spirit of expectation spread itself over all their religious life. The fierce and prejudiced waited for the signal of revolt and the shout of victory over their foes: the humble and spiritual waited for the Dayspring from on High. The Old Testament created an unsatisfied nation;

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and that was the inevitable result of its own incompleteness. With all its power and beauty it is an unfinished book.

Abiding Worth.—And yet the value of the Old Testament can scarcely be over-estimated. The heart of man remains the same in all ages. Elijah and Amos were of like passions with the men of to-day, and the faith and zeal that sustained them in their heroic battles with vice and superstition we need still, for the warfare still continues. The exiles in Babylon wept in their bereavement and prayed for restoration with a passionate longing which has made their sufferings and hopes the comfort and inspiration of oppressed peoples ever since. The Temple worshippers, seeking a closer communion with Jehovah, gave utterance to the soul's yearning for God in language so reverent and so feeling that the Psalms have become the most used book of devotions the world contains. The Scriptures that grew out of the struggles of a nation appeal to every nation in its struggles; and the higher ideals set before us in Christ calls us to a conflict which makes the record of the earlier strivings doubly instructive and precious. As long as man has a war to wage for God, humanity, and his own soul, so long will the Old Testament remain, next to the Story of Jesus, the greatest religious treasure we possess.

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ON TELLING BIBLE STORIES

THE use of this book by young people who are teaching in the Sunday school, as well as by day-school teachers, makes it desirable to emphasize a few practical points in regard to the telling of stories from the Bible. For all general questions in regard to telling stories, such as the kind of stories children of different ages enjoy, the elements of action, rhyme, and repetition, the place of the wonderful, methods of getting up a story, and delivering it—for all such points readers are referred to books entirely devoted to this subject. For general purposes perhaps the best is *How to Tell Stories to Children*, by Sara Cone Bryant (Harrap), and an invaluable book for the religious worker is *Stories and Story-Telling*, by E. P. St John (Sunday School Union).¹

Be Clear About the Truth You Want to Teach.—A good story is worth telling merely for the sake of the pleasure it gives. But we generally tell Bible stories to teach Bible truths, and for that purpose the first essential is to know exactly the message we desire to convey. The whole story must then be arranged to bring out that truth, and, in particular, the message must be thoroughly enforced by the climax. Beware, however, of moralizing.

¹ See also Miss Katherine D. Cather's excellent *Educating by Story-telling* (Harrap, 1919).

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People persist in weakening the force of stories by tacking on a moral at the end and thus producing an anticlimax. This warning, however, does not mean that the moral has to be omitted; on the contrary it means that the moral must be woven into the story itself, which is making more of the moral, not less. The story must proclaim its own truth; it must be "truth embodied in a tale," and so well embodied that as long as the tale is remembered the truth also is remembered. Moralizing is a confession of failure: it means either that we have chosen a story which does not clearly express the truth we wish to teach or that we have told the story so badly that the meaning is obscure. Let us, therefore, be quite sure of our message and that the story conveys that message and not another.

Work Up the Background.—The effectiveness of a story depends largely on vivid detail, and for this we need knowledge and constructive imagination. We must *see* the incident. When our story relates to familiar surroundings this is not difficult because we can readily supply the setting, but to supply the setting for Biblical stories we need knowledge of Palestine and its ancient customs, its hills and valleys, houses and shrines, costumes and means of travel, agricultural instruments and domestic furniture, weights and measures, how they reckoned money, how they measured time, and so on. Each tale makes its demand upon our knowledge of the land and people, and the more of these details we possess the more living our narrative will be. Our constructive imagination has to piece together the details given in the Scriptural account and those we can gather

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elsewhere until the whole story stands out vividly in our minds with plenty of colour and life. Some people have an imagination which tempts them to be independent of study. They can invent backgrounds more than can be told. But that is a misleading, dangerous, and illegitimate use of the imagination. Whenever our story has a definite historical or geographical situation, we must endeavour to be true to the facts of the case, and the only true way to the vivid telling of stories of other lands is to study the background and reconstruct the situation in our minds, until we see the whole thing happening as we speak, and make others see it with us.

Be True to the Narrative.—We must not take liberties in dealing with Scriptural stories. Other teachers are telling the same tales, and if liberties are taken others may use the same liberty in other ways and produce confusion. We may in imagination construct a background, but we must not add to the particulars supplied concerning the main characters of the tale. The story of blind Bartimæus, for example, would be made more interesting if we could say that he had a wife and little children, but we have no ground for these assumptions, and if we want to bring out the meaning of blindness in a home we must do it by subsidiary stories about other persons, or by means of supplemental talks. Otherwise we must frankly state that we are only supposing things, a method which rather weakens a story, though some stories are so good that they can well bear such treatment.

Be Free in Handling Your Material.—This looks like a contradiction of our earlier points, but while we must be true to the narrative there is no reason for repeating

GROWTH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

everything as it stands in the Bible. Indeed, a great deal of our success in teaching moral truth by telling stories depends on our ability to omit unnecessary details. Having, in accordance with our first point, made up our minds as to the truth the story is to convey, we must treat the whole passage freely with a view to making that truth stand out strong and clear. Irrelevant details should be omitted; subsidiary points, over-emphasized, for our purpose, in the narrative, should be treated more simply; condensed sentences may need opening out. Frequently considerable rearrangement is called for, so that, among other things, necessary explanations may be given before the point which depends on them is made. Enjoying this freedom, it is possible in some cases to use the same story to teach several truths : while the story remains in essence the same, the treatment of it varies according to the needs of the truth to be emphasized.

Avoid Critical Issues with Children.—There is no good gained by debating historical points before the historical sense is developed, which rarely happens until after the twelfth birthday. Whatever critical difficulties a story may present, if we use it at all, we should use it as a story and tell it as an actual event with plenty of vigour and life. The stories in this book, relating to the crossing of the Red Sea (pages 13-15) and Elijah's sacrifice (pages 34-37), show how events which have often been exaggerated into miracles may be told in a more natural way without lessening their interest. But when we are dealing with stories like those in Daniel, we shall only spoil them if we begin to talk about the conditions under

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which they were written, instead of the conditions presupposed in the stories themselves. The background for the Daniel stories is Babylonia, and in that light we must tell them, leaving their relation to the Maccabean period for discussion at an age when historical criticism can be appreciated.

Keep Jesus in the Centre.—In telling Bible stories it is important to maintain a true balance. The Old Testament tales are so vivid that there is real danger of their overshadowing the New Testament. Teachers should, therefore, realize that our aim is to teach the truth of Christ. While the Old Testament is a great mine of stories having moral force, the New is not one whit its inferior. If we try to recall the stories Jesus told, the stories told about Jesus, and the stories of His influence on others, we shall see that there is a great mass of material of which Jesus Himself is the centre. Two things are necessary : first, that we should make large use of this New Testament material ; and, second, that we should teach the Old Testament stories only to illustrate truths which harmonize with the Master's message. The second rule will prevent entirely the use of some Old Testament stories and lead to a new emphasis in many others. Observance of these points leaves little difficulty in keeping our teaching up to the Christian standard.

IMPORTANT DATES

| | B.C. |
|--|-----------------------|
| The Exodus | about 1200 |
| Period of the Judges | between 1200 and 1000 |
| David's Reign | about 1010-970 |
| Solomon's Reign | 970-930 |
| Division into Two Kingdoms : Israel and Judah | 930 |
| Elijah's Ministry | about 875-850 |
| Amos's Mission | about 760 |
| Fall of Samaria, End of Kingdom of Israel | 722 |
| Discovery of the Book, Josiah's Reforms | 621 |
| The Exile : First Deportation | 597 |
| Jerusalem destroyed : Second Deportation | 586 |
| Babylon taken by Cyrus | 538 |
| The Return under Zerubbabel | 537 |
| The Second Temple founded 536, recommenced 520, finished | 516 |
| Ezra's Mission | 458 |
| Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem's Walls | 445 |
| 'The Law,' <i>i.e.</i> , the Pentateuch, published | 444 |
| Conquests of Alexander the Great | about 250 |
| Palestine under the Ptolemies of Egypt | 300-200 |
| The Prophetic Canon complete | about 250 |
| Hebrew Language gradually replaced by Aramaic | 350-150 |
| Palestine under the Seleucidæ of Syria | 198-142 |
| Maccabean Revolt | 167-162 |
| Period of Jewish Independence | 142-63 |
| Completion of the Old Testament Canon | about 100 |
| Roman Conquest of Palestine | 63 |
| The Septuagint : The Law, 280-250 ; Rest of Greek Translation | 250-1 |

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